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The unintended consequences of high stakes testing for young people aspiring to higher education in Nigeria

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THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ASPIRING TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Jane Onyebuchi NEBE

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

School of Education

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, higher education and educational qualifications have a high value. This is because of their instrumental potential to serve as a vehicle for social and economic mobility, as well as a symbolic status for prestige and honour. However, many young people are unable to realise their aspirations for higher education due to different obstacles, one of which is High-stakes testing. Although merit-based certification and selection underpin the use of High-stakes testing, the literature suggests that they often have unintended consequences or effects. For a country like Nigeria where many young people contend with social issues like unemployment, poverty and inequality, the importance of understanding the effect of High-stakes testing on those who are choosing higher education as a means of combating these issues, cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, this study aims to explore the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for secondary school leavers in Nigeria who were aspiring to go onto higher education. This was achieved by examining their views, hypothetical preferences and lived experiences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate Examinations (exit CEs), in order to identify the unintended consequences of the exit CEs and establish how the exit CEs affect their aspiration for higher education. A Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) design provided methodological guidance, with the use of life-grids, semi-structured interviews and a vignette-based questionnaire for data collection. Qualitative data was collected from 10 research participants, which informed the subsequent design of the vignette-based questionnaire that was used to collect quantitative data from 268 respondents. Qualitative data analysis was carried out using the thematic analysis technique, while quantitative data analysis involved both descriptive statistical methods and frequency counts from thematic analysis. Findings from both types of data were integrated and interpreted by drawing heavily from Arjun Appadurai's conception of the 'Capacity to Aspire'. Appadurai had conceptualised the capacity to aspire as both a cultural and navigational capacity for successfully negotiating the requirements to realise aspirational wants and preferences. This study found that High-stakes testing in the Nigerian context can create a constraining environment for young people's capacity to aspire to higher education through its reproduction of social and educational inequalities, the influence of significant others on the experience of the High-stakes exam and the nature of grade outcomes from the High-stakes exam. The study also identified other unintended consequences of High-stakes testing in the Nigerian context to include the; heightened participation in examination-oriented private tutoring, pervasive propensity for examination malpractices, altering of higher education aspirations in some ways, and delay to academic progression. These findings have implications for the deficit views that are held about the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing, and the possible ways to strengthen young people's capacity to aspire to higher education within a context like Nigeria.

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Isabelle Chinagorom Nebe UKA, who was born during the PhD programme and who changed my life in amazing ways. I love you, my dearest.

AND

To my Father, Prince Benjamin Nwofor NEBE who gave us his best while he lived, but unfortunately died on 13th January 2009. We miss you, Dad.

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To all my network of friends, past and present, online and offline who have continued to cheer my progress: I appreciate you all!

To my great future: Here I come!

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Jane Onyebuchi NEBE DATE: May 2020

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CASS	Continuous Assessment Scores
CE	Certificate Examination
COM	Cut Off Marks
JSS	Junior Secondary School
HE	Higher Education
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
HSEEAQ	High-Stakes Examinations and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire
JAMB	Joint Admission Matriculation Board
JSS	Junior Secondary School
NABTEB	National Business and Technical Education Board
NBTE	National Board for Technical Education
NECO	National Examination Council
SSS	Senior Secondary School
TASS	Terminal Assessment Score
UTME	Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination
WAEC	West African Examination Council
WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

When I was told that WAEC result was out, it's like my blood pressure went high
(female secondary school leaver, age 19, Nigeria)

The quote above captures the feeling of a female student when the results for one of Nigeria's 2016 senior school exit Certificate Examinations (hereafter referred to as the 'exit CEs' throughout this report) was released. The emotional investment on the outcomes of the exit CEs is not uncommon because this examination and similar others in Nigeria's education system, have serious or important consequences attached to them for the young people who take them, and for their family members/guardians who support and sponsor them. Without the exit CEs result or its equivalent, many young people will be unable to realise their aspirations for higher education or dreams of a white-collar job in contemporary Nigeria. This is because the exit CEs serves the dual purpose of *certification* for the successful completion of six years of secondary education (a useful certificate for semi-skilled formal employment) and is one of the requirements for *selection* into higher education. Sometimes, the consequences attached to the exit CE and other High-stakes assessments can extend well into the future of the individuals. For instance, the current President's return to office was nearly jeopardised when he could not provide a secondary school exit CE qualification (Yekeen, 2019)[1]. Section 131 (d) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) stipulates that "*A person shall be qualified for election to the office of President if- (d) he has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent*" (Osipitan, 2015). Therefore, the turnout for these exit Certificate Examinations is often high considering the age demographic of Nigeria's population. For instance, about 1.6 million students registered for the exit CE that is administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) in each of 2016, 2017 and 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2019).

[1] This was resolved when the Cambridge Assessment issued a certifying statement for his qualifications gained in 1961 from what was then the University of Cambridge Examinations Syndicate

Furthermore, many young people are already facing complicated transitions to adulthood because of a wider array of pathways and requirements for achieving imagined futures (Mcdonald et. al 2011). For the Nigerian youth, this complexity is further nuanced by existing social issues like high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality even though Nigeria is rich in natural resources. As of 2020, Nigeria is estimated as the seventh most populous country in the world with over 200 million people (United Nations [UN], 2018). Unfortunately, nearly 50% of Nigeria's population live in poverty by 2018, based on the international poverty line of US$ 1.90 per day (World Bank, 2019a). Successfully navigating High-stakes examinations is, therefore, one way to be advantaged amid disadvantages. Depending on the achievement outcomes, the exit CEs promise a step closer towards economic and social mobility (Dilliard, 2003). Therefore students, teachers, parents/guardians and schools continue to invest heavily in trying to ensure success in the exit CEs at all cost (Alhassan & Anya, 2017).

Examinations and other types of assessments, which have significant implications or high consequences for stakeholders, for example in terms of educational progress, career, status and financial security, has come to be known as High-stakes testing (Stobart & Eggen, 2012). High-stakes testing is a feature of many education systems around the world for purposes like certification, selection, and accountability (Jones & Ennes, 2018; Moses & Nanna, 2007; Phelps, 2000; W. Smith, 2016). In Nigeria, High-stakes testing permeates all the levels of the education system. It is the instrument of choice for transitions within the education system, a development that has been traced to the impact of Nigeria's colonial history and the increasing demand for higher education (Alhassan & Anya, 2017; Fafunwa, 2018; Dillard, 2003). A typical Nigerian student must successfully negotiate High-stakes examinations when they make the transition from primary to junior secondary school, junior to senior secondary school, graduate from secondary school and seek entry into higher education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Therefore, High-stakes testing has significant implications for young people's earnings, status and wellbeing in Nigeria, although this would be different for different groups of young people. For instance, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may feel the impact of High-stakes testing more because it might be their only

chance of escape from deprivation. While the demand for post-secondary education usually exceeds available admission spaces especially in universities, and the formal economy is unable to absorb the large number of graduates, High-stakes testing is also perceived to be a fair way of distributing opportunity by merit into education and the employment market.

Against this background, young people would inevitably be emotionally invested in the High-stakes examinations. This then raises the question of how the experience of taking these High-stakes examinations and their outcomes influence young people's aspirations. Considering that meritocratic selection into higher education underpins the use of High-stakes examinations like the exit CEs, the mismatches between High-stakes testing and young people's aspirations for higher education will be useful knowledge. Focusing on the Nigerian context, this study explores the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing from the perspectives and lived experiences of young people aspiring to higher education. This study is important because it seeks to present new, original, and contextual evidence that contributes to an enriched understanding of the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for young people. The participants in this study were young Nigerian students who had aspirations for higher education, had completed secondary school as well as sat for the exit CEs. At the time of this study, they were attending classes at nine tutorial centres in a small urban town called Awka at Anambra State, South-East Nigeria, in preparation for another High-stakes examination that is also required to be able to gain admission into Nigeria's higher education institutions.

1.2 RESEARCH RATIONALE

The underlying rationales for undertaking this study is situated within the academic literature, Nigeria's national context and personal experience. This is discussed in the subsequent subsections.

1.2.1 International

High-stakes testing is increasing as a prominent part of education globally, both in scope and importance (Stobart & Eggen, 2012). It now influences educational processes, practices, policies and reforms in many countries (W. Smith, 2016). For example, countries like the US, UK, Italy, France and South Africa have used High-stakes testing as a policy for selection and to set, raise, promote and evaluate educational standards, while also monitoring and holding education providers and education systems accountable (W. Smith, 2016; Lingard et al. 2013; Stobart and Eggen, 2012; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002; Minarechová, 2012; Balwanz, 2016; Madaus & Russell, 2010; Phelps, 2006). Another instance is the examination systems in the 15 former republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which expanded rapidly after the dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s, to accommodate the use of High-stakes testing for fairer selections into higher education (Bethell & Zabulionis, 2012). In the UK, there have been debates about the cost/benefit of a low-stakes versus High-stakes approach to testing for the students (Torrance, 2009). With this increasing expansion of High-stakes testing, there are growing concerns about their consequences (Howie, 2012). W. Smith (2016) argues that the rapid expansion of High-stakes testing is giving rise to a 'Global Testing Culture', where High-stakes testing comes to define educational aims, roles, values and practices. As a result, the "*practice of testing becomes synonymous with education quality...and equated with accountability*" (W. Smith, 2016, p. 11). The danger with this is linked to the consequences of High-stakes testing that have been researched and identified in the literature and which will be discussed in chapter 2.

This study, therefore, builds on existing research by specifically examining the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing within the Nigerian context, for test-takers who are aspiring to go on to higher education. The focus will be on the test-takers themselves as the study will draw on their perceptions and lived experience of the exit CEs. The consequences (both intended and unintended) of High-stakes testing as voiced by the test-takers themselves have not been adequately included in the literature on High-stakes testing. For Elwood (2015), the presumed outsiders to assessment debates, that is, the test-takers, should be perceived as 'authorities' on assessment dilemmas because they are the ones who know where and how it affects them most. Thomson (2008) emphasizes that "*young people are*

capable of providing expert testimony about their experiences, associations and lifestyles" (p. 1). Although including the student voice in assessment debates is not unproblematic, some scholars, however, agree that it is necessary (Elwood, 2015; Fielding, 2004). This study will speak to this gap by drawing evidence from the perceptions and lived experiences of High-stakes examination in the Nigerian context, as voiced by young test-takers who are aspiring to higher education and are actively negotiating the realization of their aspiration, to contribute contextual and evidence-based knowledge about the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing.

1.2.2 Local context

In Nigeria, High-stakes testing has come to shape the values that Nigerians hold about education and what an educated person should have been taught, learnt and be able to do (Ekoh, 2012). For instance, poor performance in the senior school exit Certificate Examinations (exit CEs) continues to be viewed as an indicator of falling standards in education at the systemic level, as well as a sign of deficient characteristics on the part of the individual test-takers (see Okoroma, 2007; Oyewole & Osalusi, 2016). As a result, much emphasis is placed on students' performance in the exit CEs by parents, teachers, schools, government and the Nigerian society at large. This puts enormous pressure on the students especially those who aspire to higher education, because they must successfully negotiate the exit CE or its alternatives by obtaining at least credit grades in 5 subjects that are relevant to their preferred course and institution, and which should usually include English Language and Mathematics. In 2017, 2018 and 2019; only 52.3%, 56.5% and 48.1% respectively of the total examination candidates met the grade benchmarks that include English Language and Mathematics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Although students can resit for the examinations as private or external candidates (as was the case with some of the research participants in this study), there are financial implications for that decision. Therefore, investigating the kind of unintended consequences that the exit CEs facilitate for young people aspiring to higher education, would extend knowledge on the impact that High-stakes testing has on the aspiration to go onto higher education in the Nigerian context.

Secondly, the Nigerian society places a high premium on higher education and educational qualifications because, for many, it is a route to social and economic mobility, as well as prestige and honour (Dilliard, 2003; Okolie, 2019). Unfortunately, many young people are unable to realise their aspirations for higher education due to the obstacles that High-stakes testing continue to constitute. For instance, in addition to the exit CEs, young people who aspire to higher education must also successfully negotiate the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), the entrance exam for higher education institutions in Nigeria. This was the exam that the research participants in this study were attending tutorials for during data collection. However, the number of UTME applicants continue to outweigh the number of available spaces in higher education institutions (Akinyemi & Ofem, 2012). For instance, in 2017, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) successfully facilitated only 32.9% of 1,722,236 applications; while only 55.26% of the quota for places in the higher education institutions that were offered to students were taken up (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2018). This implies that more than one million secondary school leavers did not achieve their aspirations to go to higher education in 2017. Although some of them are disenfranchised by their inability to meet the requirements, others are disenfranchised by high cut off scores because of limited spaces even when their scores would suffice for the same course in another university (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2018). Yet, many students do not fall into either of these categories. This study will help to shed light on why many young people are unable to realise their aspirations for higher education.

Thirdly, despite what is now known about the consequences of High-stakes testing globally, a comprehensive review of Nigeria's literature reveal that the consequences of High-stakes testing are an under-researched topic. The focus in Nigeria's assessment literature has been on issues like the validity/reliability of test items (e.g. Bandele & Adewale, 2013), students' academic performance in the examinations (e.g. Ali & Enyo, 2016), School Based Assessment (e.g. Aduloju, Adikwu & Agi, 2016; Oyedeji, 2016), Continuous Assessment (e.g. Faleye & Adefisoye, 2016), computer-based testing (e.g. Ogini, 2018), comparisons of examination agencies (e.g. Anigbo, 2018) and examination malpractices (e.g. Alhassan & Anya, 2017; Gbagolo, 2011; Okolie et al. 2019). Furthermore, these topics are often uncritically researched, with a preponderance of quantitative studies that focus on the perceptions of

teachers and students, rather than on the lived experiences of the students participating in High-stakes testing situations. By studying the perceptions and lived experiences of young people in the Nigerian context, whose aspiration to go onto higher education might have been disrupted or altered by their grade outcomes and experience of High-stakes testing, new evidence that would extend existing knowledge about the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing can emerge. It is anticipated that this would inform context-specific recommendations on how to address any identified unintended consequences and include the voices of young people in the key debates on the consequences of High-stakes testing.

1.2.3 Personal

Growing up in Nigeria, I encountered the enormous impact that unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CEs can have on a young person and this triggered my interest in the current study. Many of those with unsatisfactory achievement outcomes must retake the exit Certificate examinations, sometimes more than twice to achieve the required grades, thereby investing more of their time and money in these High-stakes examinations. I was also bothered by the deficit discourses in Nigeria's literature and wider society, which places sole responsibility on the students for their outcomes in High-stakes examinations, and casts them as 'failures' when unsatisfactory outcomes are experienced. I made this observation through the young people that I encountered in my roles as a teacher in a church's youth department, an administrator in a higher education institution, researcher on an interdisciplinary project, and assistant registrar at an examination council. Through this study, I hope to generate evidence-based solutions to some of the challenges that young people encounter in their educational trajectory. I also foresee a future where I would set up a non-governmental organization/charity to support young people who are socially and educationally disadvantaged.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to explore the unintended consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate examination for young people aspiring to go onto higher education. In this

way, the study seeks to include the voices of test-takers in the debates on the consequences of High-stakes testing and provide contextual evidence of the ways that High-stakes testing affects young people who have aspirations for higher education. To realize this aim, the objectives of this study were to:

1. Critically review international literature on High-stakes testing, as well as its intended and unintended consequences,
2. Appraise Nigeria's primary, secondary and higher education system and their associated High-stakes assessments,
3. Conduct a Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) using Life-Grids, interviews and vignette-based questionnaires with young people who have sat for the exit CEs and aspire to go onto higher education,
4. Examine the implications of the research findings for High-stakes testing globally and Nigeria specifically, highlight potential areas for further research and provide recommendations for improving the experience of High-stakes testing in Nigeria.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will address three research questions in order to achieve the research aim.

RQ1: What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs)?

To address RQ1, two sub-questions will inform data analysis as follows:

a) What views do secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education hold concerning the exit CEs and their potential consequences?

b) What are the hypothetical options of secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, when confronted with hypothetical exit CEs outcomes?

RQ2: How does the lived experience of the exit CEs affect secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?

To address RQ2, three sub-questions will inform the analysis of the data as follows:

a) What is the lived experience of the exit CEs like for secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education in Nigeria?

b) What strategies do secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education use to negotiate the exit CEs?

c) What factors influence secondary school leavers aspiration for higher education?

RQ3: What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?

1.5 THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

To address the research questions, the literature on High-stakes testing and aspirations informed data collection and analysis, while Appadurai's (2013) theorisation of the Capacity to Aspire was used to interpret how examinations influenced the decisions that secondary school leavers make about going to higher education. In this study, testing is used interchangeably and broadly to mean the use of tests, examinations and any other assessment instruments for gathering evidence about academic characteristics and achievement (Stobart, 2008). Therefore, High-stakes testing generally encompasses all the types of educational assessment with high importance for the test-taker. However, this study specifically focuses on the senior school exit Certificate Examination (exit CE), a High-stakes examination in the Nigerian context for students who have completed three years of senior secondary school.

A key concept in the High-stakes testing literature is consequences, which is the perceived or real effect/impact of interpreting and using test scores for what it was intended or purposed

for (Dahlin, & Ekholm, 2005; Liying, 2000; Messick 1996; Taylor, 2005; Togut, 2004; Watkins, Zumbo & Hubley, 2016). Other terms that are loosely synonymous with consequences in the literature include 'washback' effect (e.g. Elshawa et. al. 2016; Green, 2007; Bailey, 1999; Khaniya, 1990) and 'backwash' effect (e.g. Karaata, 2012; Watkins, et al. 2005; Somerset, 1996). However, washback and backwash effects specifically describe the backwards influence of the test on processes leading up to the test, e.g. how teaching and learning are changed to prepare students for the test. Since this study collected data from the research participants after they had sat for the exit CEs and completed secondary school, the term washback or backwash effect does not seem appropriate. This study adopts the term 'consequences' since it broadly encompasses both backward and 'afterward' effects; that is, effects that occur before and after the testing.

Research on the consequences of High-stakes testing has been framed in several ways - social and personal consequences, intended and unintended consequences, positive and negative consequences (De Lisle & McMillan-Solomon, 2017; Haertel, 2013; Hubley & Zumbo, 2011; 2013). Social consequences refer to the differential and systematic impact that testing has on a group level rather on the individual level, while individual consequences describe the opposite (Hubley & Zumbo, 2011; 2013; Kane et al. 1999; Kane, 2012; 2016; Zumbo & Hubley, 2016;). The notion of 'Consequential Validity' has been used to describe the incorporation of social consequences into validity considerations (Messick, 1989; 1995). This study is not interested in consequential validity. On the other hand, intended consequences are the effects and impact that were initially planned for or anticipated in the design and administration of an assessment instrument, while unintended consequences describe the opposite (Zumbo & Hubley, 2016). This study is interested in unintended consequences.

Unintended consequences have been synonymously used to mean consequences that are 'negative' (Blazer, 2011; Norman, 2015; W. Smith, 2016) or 'destructive' (Stobart 2008); thereby suggesting that intended consequences are usually 'positive' and 'constructive'. However, this is not always the case. For instance, Cizek (2001) identified 10 positive consequences of High-stakes testing in the United States that he argued were unintended and

absent in the discourse surrounding High-stakes testing. Therefore, this study interprets unintended consequences as any perceived or actual effects of the practice of High-stakes testing, whether positively or negatively construed, which is not explicitly stated or implied in the rationale or purpose for that High-stakes testing. While data collection addressed the perceptions and lived experiences of the secondary school exit Certificate examination, the unintended consequences of this High-stakes examination were deduced from the data during analysis and interpretation. This means that the research participants in this study may have reported both intended and unintended consequences of High-stakes testing, but this study focused on identifying the unintended consequences in their perceptions and lived experiences, through interpretation.

To present a critical account of how the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing shaped the aspiration to go to higher education, this study utilised a conceptual framework that draws on Arjun Appadurai's (2013) conception of aspiration as both a cultural and navigational capacity through the notion of the 'Capacity to Aspire'. The capacity to aspire is the ability to negotiate the '*map of a journey into the future*' (Appadurai 2013, p. 191). It is "*the ability of individuals to generate an idea/picture of a desirable future for themselves and to commit to its realisation*" (Baillergeau & Dyvendak 2019, p. 2). For Appadurai (2013), the capacity to aspire is unevenly distributed, such that does who are better off in relation to resources, status and education have a "*more fully developed capacity to aspire*" (p. 188) than their less privileged counterparts. As a cultural capacity, the capacity to aspire draws on cultural systems to define what is good to aspire to. As a navigational capacity, the capacity to aspire draws on the knowledge and experiences that are derived from the cultural system, to navigate the "*combination of nodes and pathways"* on one's map of aspirations (Appadurai, 2013, p. 189). Therefore, people with different resources and education are differently able to imagine possible futures for themselves; that is, the capacity to aspire is possessed differently by different people. The young people who participated in this study had completed secondary school, sat for the exit Certificate Examination (exit CE) and were aspiring to go onto higher education. Analysing their perceptions and lived experiences of the High-stakes exit CE, Appadurai's conception of the capacity to aspire was used to interpret the unintended consequences of the High-stakes exit CE for them.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW

This study adopted a Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) design because it promised a more rigorous way to explore the research topic, compared to the quantitative and pragmatic research that currently dominate High-stakes testing literature. MMPR is underpinned by phenomenology as a philosophical approach (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014; 2015). Phenomenology advocates the direct knowing of a phenomenon as it is consciously experienced and require researchers to go 'back to the things' themselves to understand the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Spiegelberg, 1975; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 1997, 2014). Phenomenology place emphasis on the meanings that are deduced from lived experience, and therefore encourages minimal imposition of theories at the onset of the research, because theories impose meanings through the pre-conceptions and interpretations that they provide (Larkin et al. 2006; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014, 2015; J. Smith & Osborne, 2015). Therefore, in this study, the theoretical concept 'capacity to aspire' was solely used as an interpretive framework, in line with the underlying principle of phenomenology, because "*phenomenology uses theory as a foil for examining what it glosses*" (van Manen, 2014, p. 67). That is, phenomenology uses theory to emphasise and enhance the issue that is being examined. In this study, the theorisation of the capacity to aspire was deemed suitable because it acknowledged the agency of people in determining, pursuing, reviewing, and adapting their aspirations. This meant that the concept 'capacity to aspire' adequately articulated why young people didn't just passively experience examinations, but actively negotiated and navigated the examinations to realise their HE aspirations.

Mixed methods in this study mean the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study. Life grids and semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from 10 research participants, which sought answers to research question 2 (through its sub-questions) about the unintended consequences of the exit CE based on lived experience. Life-Grids are charts that are designed to enable the representation of biographical events visually using texts and images (Parry et al. 1999; Richardson et al. 2009). Analysis of the qualitative data was accomplished using Thematic analysis. The qualitative

data then informed the design of a vignette-based questionnaire that I termed the 'High Stakes Examination and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ). This was administered to 268 respondents (excludes the previous 10 research participants), who were all enrolled in nine private tutorial centres that prepare students for the entrance exams into HEIs, another type of High-stakes exams for students seeking admission into HEIs. Data from this subsequent quantitative phase provided answers to research question 1 (through its sub-questions), which was intended to offer insight on the unintended consequences of the exit CEs based on the respondents' views and hypothetical preferences. Descriptive Statistical Analysis techniques were used for the Quantitative data. Findings from both phases were then integrated to address research question 3 about how the exit CEs influenced the aspiration to go to higher education. Details about the research sample, data collection and analysis procedures as well as other methodological issues are discussed in Chapter 4. The principles of the MMPR design align adequately with the aim of this study, which is to explore the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for young secondary school leavers who were aspiring to go to higher education in Nigeria.

1.7 THESIS OVERVIEW

This Thesis is comprised of eight chapters. This first chapter has introduced the research problem, the rationale for the choice of the research problem, research aim, objectives, and questions as well as overviews of the theoretical framework and research design. The next chapter provides an understanding of the extant literature that shaped the focus of this study while identifying the gap that this study addressed. Young people's experiences of examinations are shaped by their contexts, including the types of educational institutions they attended and the accessibility of Higher education. So, chapter 3 describes the context for examinations in Nigeria with a focus on Nigeria's education system. Chapter 4 discusses how the research was carried out rigorously, while been transparent about the research process. In Chapter 5, the research findings from the quantitative data that was collected using a High Stakes Examinations and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ), in response to research question 1 is presented. Chapter 6 discusses the research findings from the qualitative data, in response to research question 2. Then, chapter 7 addresses research

question 3 by drawing on the theoretical framework and literature review of this research, to interpret the research findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data. The thesis concludes with chapter 8, which summarises the contributions of this study to existing knowledge and examines the implications of these contributions. Finally, a reflexive account of the ways that this PhD study has impacted on the researcher ends this chapter/thesis.

CHAPTER 2

A LITERATURE REVIEW ON HIGH-STAKES TESTING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into the academic literature on High-stakes testing in order to review and critique its rationale, practice, consequences as well as its impact on aspirations. Given that this study aims to explore the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for Nigeria's secondary school leavers who are aspiring to higher education, this chapter will shed light on the academic debates that informed the focus of this research, while identifying the gap that it addresses. The chapter begins with a discussion on the rationale for High-stakes testing in relation to certification, selection, education quality and accountability, as well as the prevalence of two main types of High-stakes assessment. Then, both the intended and unintended consequences that research has associated with High-stakes testing for schools, teachers, students and the wider education system are examined. The chapter continues with a discussion on how High-stakes testing is linked to higher education aspirations through its gatekeeping function and impact. Then, the chapter ends with an examination of the 'aspiration' concept, and how the relationship between High-stakes testing and aspirations will be further explored in this study using Appadurai's conceptualisation of the capacity to aspire. The underlying argument of this chapter is that there is a need for research that investigates the consequences of High-stakes testing through young people's lived experiences as voiced by them and in under-researched contexts. This study addresses this need.

2.2 RATIONALE FOR HIGH-STAKES TESTING

High-stakes testing encompasses standardised achievement assessments whose outcomes have serious consequences (Marchant, 2004; Stobart & Eggen, 2012). The rationale behind High-stakes testing is largely determined by its uses and users. High-stakes testing is commonly used in relation to assessments that are High-stakes for the test takers, and this is the way that High-stakes testing is interpreted in this study. However, some assessments are used for High-stakes evaluation of educators and schools as accountability mechanisms, as well as High-stakes evaluation of education systems in terms of education quality. The sub-

sections below explore four main purposes of High-stakes assessments globally. These purposes are indicative of their intended consequences, but they are not mutually exclusive since a High-stakes test can serve more than one purpose at the same time.

2.2.1 Certification and Qualification

Certification and Qualification are two sides of the same coin. While certification is the award of a formal document by a competent institution to certify that the required standards of achievement have been met or not, qualification refers to the standards that have been met or not (Dufaux, 2012). The key roles of Certification and qualifications are to provide information mainly for employers and higher education institutions, since they should indicate and communicate the level of proficiencies that the certified and qualified have. High-stakes testing is often the tool that is used for making decisions about certifications and qualifications (Scheerans et al 2003). Many secondary/high school exit examinations, which are taken by students at the end of their secondary/high school education in many Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries fall into this category (Dufaux, 2012). This is also the case in many Sub-Saharan African countries where certifications/qualifications from High-stakes testing mostly determine admission into higher education institutions. (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). When High-stakes tests are used in this way, not only do they serve selection functions for post-secondary progression towards education or employment, they shape educational pursuits and life expectations.

One of the challenges that emerge from using High-stakes testing for this purpose is the difficulty for test-takers to have counter-narratives under a strong testing culture that places much value on certificates and qualifications, in the face of social and economic realities that constrain one to go with the flow of the prevailing culture, if one wishes to succeed. For instance, Balwanz (2016) found that his participants who earnestly critiqued how the National School Certificate (NSC) in South Africa had become the goal of secondary education, were comfortable with the status quo. Another challenge with the use of High-stakes testing for Certifications and Qualifications is how it can engender qualifications inflation and qualification escalation, a phenomenon that Dore (1997) refers to as the Diploma Disease.

Diploma disease arises when the societal emphasis on certifications and qualifications lead to the increase in the qualification level for a job (qualification escalation) or the decrease in the job level that a certification or qualification can be suitable for (qualification inflation) (Ibid.). Dore (1997) therefore argues that the more pervasive the importance attached to certification and qualifications for employment decisions, the higher the tendency for teaching and learning to become ritualistic and instrumentally oriented. The testing culture is self-reinforcing and from international evidence, continues to shape how education is understood, valued and used (W. Smith, 2016). For instance, in Smyth and Banks' (2012) mixed method longitudinal study, they were able to trace a shift in how students who initially critiqued the exam-focused nature of classroom activities, became accepting and favourably disposed to it as the High-stakes examination approached. The implication of these is that High-stakes testing will continue to play important roles in Certifications and Qualifications.

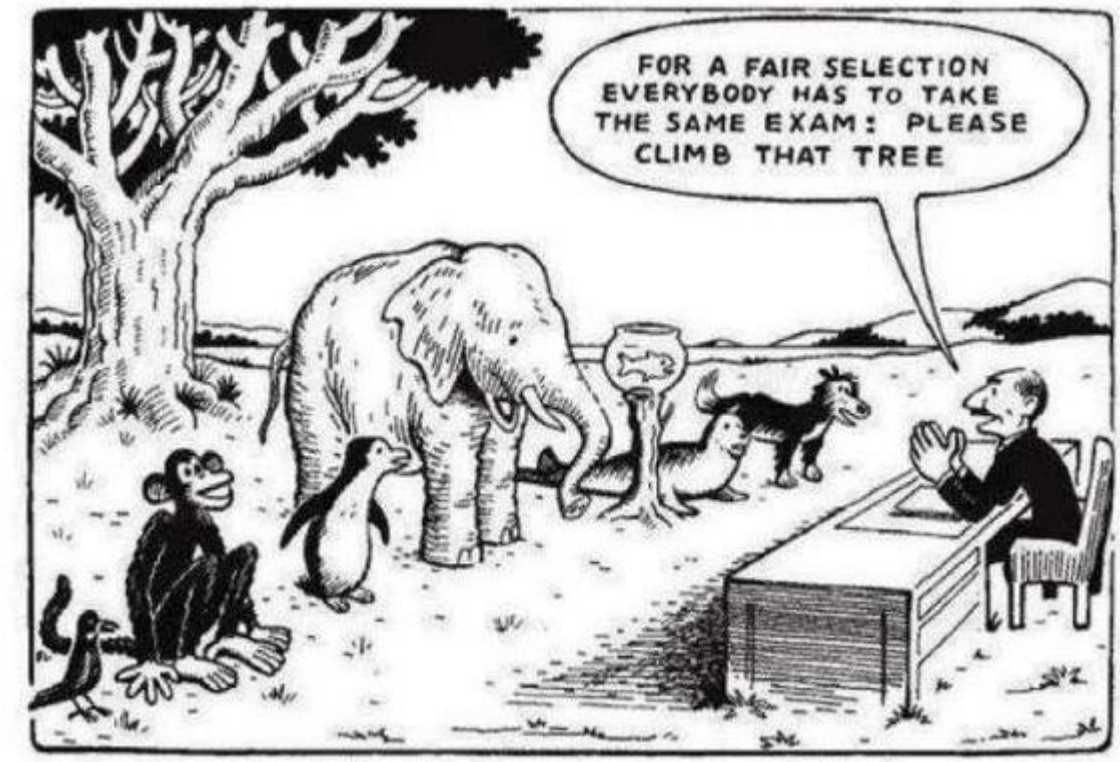
2.2.2 Selection and the underlying idea of Meritocracy

As previously mentioned, the certification/qualification from many High-stakes assessments is used to make selection decisions for employment and higher education admissions (Sackett et al. 2008). Stobart and Eggen (2012) note that historically, selection was the initial and main rationale for High-stakes testing as they traced its origins to the Chinese Imperial Examination System, which was used for selection into China's civil service 2000 years ago. Two assumptions are implicit in the use of High-stakes testing for selection. First, High-stakes testing is an objective measure of intelligence, ability and effort. The assessment literature has shown that this is not always the case (Kohn, 2000; Koretz, 2008; 2017). Second, High-stakes testing makes selection fair by giving everyone an equal chance of success based on merit. This assumption is referred to as meritocracy in the literature. According to Au (2016, p. 46):

> *The ideology of meritocracy asserts that, regardless of social position, economic class, gender, race, or culture (or any other form of socially or institutionally defined difference), everyone has an equal chance at becoming "successful" based purely on individual merit and hard work. Consequently, the ideology of meritocracy also asserts that failure is due to an individual person's (or individual group's) lack of effort and hard work…or…a lack of grit.*

Proponents of a meritocratic system argue that merit expands the opportunities accessible to all and promotes a just society (Kennedy & Power, 2010). However, scholars like Au (2013; 2016) argue that meritocracy is a problematic ideology because it ignores the role that structural inequalities play in the academic achievement of the disadvantaged and marginalised, by attributing low levels of achievement to individual characteristics and ineptitude. Yet, meritocracy appears to offer the disadvantaged and marginalised opportunities for upward mobility, despite that it enables the reproduction of the issues that put them at a disadvantage (Wiederkehr et al. 2015). Figure 1 below illustrates the disconnect between the assumptions and realities of Meritocracy.

Figure 1: Meritocracy



Source: https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/the-perils-of-standardized-testing/

Drawing heavily on Michael Young's (1958) formulation and critique of the concept of meritocracy in his satirical book on '*The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033: an essay on education and equality',* Crawford (2010) argues that although the principle of merit is important, it is a socially constructed and politically manufactured notion.

What we consider to be worthy of merit or constitutes meritorious behaviour is contingent and formed, reformed and transformed through the processes of social interaction, interpretation and self-reflection (p. 5)

This, therefore, mean that although selection based on merit is an ideal standard, meritocracy is a subjective criterion with its characteristics defined by the powerful who determine what is worthy of merit and what isn't. For Souto- Otero (2010), the key debates around meritocracy is "*logically and empirically flawed*" (p. 408) because individual ability is tied to normative expectations and social class. Research has shown that academic achievement is not only determined by individual variables, because social variables like class, status and gender contribute their impact as well (Baker et al. 2014; Kennedy & Power, 2012; Souto-Otero, 2010). In their critical review of the key debates surrounding the factors that underpin racial disparities in Mathematics assessments for students in the US, Cobb and Russell (2015) problematises how meritocracy assumes that "*all students receive the same access to academic content, instructional design, and pedagogy*" (p. 633). Thus, while meritocracy selection is premised on giving equal chance to all, it overlooks the fact that everyone does not have equal access to this equal chance.

2.2.3 Monitoring and Evaluating Education Quality

There is no universal consensus on how to define education quality and this is attributed to contextual differences in expectations, requirements and values (Adams, 1993; Tikly, 2010). Nonetheless, input, process, and output/outcome are key elements in the framework for understanding education quality – (Scheerens et al. 2003). Education quality can be framed in terms of input measures or resources invested into education (e.g. materials, financial and human), processes (teaching and learning) and output/outcomes such as achievement, attainment and graduation rates etc. (Chapman & Adams, 2002; Somerset, 1996). Adams (1993) identified additional framings of education quality in terms of reputation (usually based on assumptions about input and output/outcome), content (bias towards specific curricular content) and value-added as it relates to the students. These framings are influenced by the contextual/environmental conditions within which education quality is being operationalised (Scheerens et al. 2003; UNICEF 2000; UNESCO 2005). Thus, the definition of education quality is dynamic, often multi-dimensional and influenced by individual/cultural/societal values (Adams, 1993).

There are education systems that use High-stakes testing to set, improve, promote, regulate and evaluate education quality (W. Smith, 2016; Stobart and Eggen, 2012; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002). For some countries, student achievement in High-stakes tests is the key indicator of education quality (Thomas, et al. 2012; Thomas & Peng, 2004; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). The rate at which students pass these High-stakes examinations is used as performance indicators of the quality of the education system/sub-systems. This is the case in Sub-Saharan African countries like Namibia, Kenya, South Africa and Malawi (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Tikly and Barrett (2011) note that this is problematic because a shift can easily occur from "*being privileged indicators of quality to defining quality*" (p. 6). When High-stakes test outcomes define quality, it means that it is the core characteristic for determining education quality. But as an indicator, it means that it is one of several characteristics, so that other quality indicators and processes can come into play in defining quality (ibid.). The implication of this is the downplay of other important indicators, knowing that assessment outcomes are insufficient measures for quality since they provide little or no information about educational processes and intrinsic benefits (Barrett, 2009). Furthermore, when educational systems rely too much on High-stakes testing outcomes as education quality indicators, learning objectives that are not easily measurable by such tests are neglected (Thomas, et al. 2012; Thomas & Peng, 2004; Tikly and Barrett, 2011). Popham (2000) also adds that it is a misfit to use High-stakes testing outcomes to draw inferences about education quality because they have "*different measurement mission[s]"* (p. 400). Sometimes, however, these contexts are constrained to rely on the outcomes of High-stakes tests as the main tool for obtaining information about the quality of their education system because of its relatively low cost and speed of availability/implementation, as well as a possible lack of other measures of student outcomes (Linn, 2000).

In some other contexts, High-stakes testing is used to promote educational reforms when they are used to define the kind of improvements in education quality that the policymakers want to see (W. Smith, 2016; Stobart & Eggen, 2012; World Bank, 2008a, 2008b; Nichols, 2007; Yeh, 2005). Consequently, they are used to evaluate educational interventions by clarifying performance expectations and measuring compliance with these expectations

(Madaus & Russell, 2010; Hamilton, 2003, Linn 2000). Linn (1998) notes that this is a popular reason for policymakers because it is inexpensive, can be easily mandated externally and implemented rapidly before the next election cycle and is measurable through the visible test results. The problem with this is how the additional expectations overburden teachers. Another challenge with this is how it can engender controversial changes in achievement levels (Sahlberg, 2010). An example was the Lake Wobegon effect of the 1980s in the United States where there were rapid increases in achievement levels, even above the average norms when schools and teachers began to be held accountable. These changes were later found to be inaccurate and inflated because it involved the exclusion of at-risk students, and a preponderance of test practice within classrooms as the curriculum was narrowed (Koretz, 2008; Linn 1998). Thus, showing that the relationship between High-stakes testing and education quality is not always a positive one for the students.

2.2.4 Accountability

The use of High-stakes testing as an accountability mechanism means that education service providers are held responsible for the quality and quantity of their outcomes and the outcomes of their students (Madaus & Russell, 2010; Scheerens et al, 2003; Thomas et al. 2012). Thus, they are under public scrutiny and can be sanctioned or rewarded based on how their performances are judged. Rewards may come in the form of recognition while sanctions can come in the form of an external takeover (Nichols et al. 2012). A case in point is Chile's education system where teachers with high student scores get salary incentives (Klinger et al. 2008). Test-based accountability systems, therefore, increase the stakes of the tests for the education service providers.

The Accountability agenda is engendered mainly by a need to justify the investments in education, as well as increased decentralisation of education/schools for increased central monitoring. This is underpinned by growing importance that is ascribed to education in the wider socio-political space as well as an assumption that it would improve education quality/outcomes (Scheerens et al, 2003). For instance, the United States has a long history of a test-based accountability system that culminated into the 2002 No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) Act. This Act relied heavily on the use of High-stakes testing to hold schools and teachers accountable (Au, 2013; Moses & Nanna, 2007). Several studies have however shown that although the Act was well-intentioned, it engendered some unintended consequences that will be discussed in detail later (Linn 1998; Koretz, 2008; Au, 2009, 2013; Sahlberg, 2010). In December 2015, the NCLB Act was replaced by the '*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA*)' with effect from the 2017/2018 academic session. Although ESSA decentralised control to the States, it still maintained a High-stakes testing-based accountability system (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Reviewing five decades of testing in the US, Linn (1998) concludes that in a test-based accountability system, the attachment of High-stakes to assessment causes them to lose their credibility and dependability over time as people find ways to gain (corrupt/inflated) advantage over the system.

A common accountability mechanism is the use of school league tables, which report school performance based on their students' achievement in High-stakes examinations. For example, in England, Portugal and Canada, school league tables have been used as accountability mechanisms (Goldstein and Leckie 2016; Nunes et al 2015; Volante, 2005). School league tables can promote transparency, informed school choice by parents as well as a healthy competition between and within schools. However, they can also lead to unhealthy competition and a deterioration in peer collaborations between teachers and schools (UNESCO, 2017). Nonetheless, they have been known to help with enforcing compliance with the teaching and learning of test content, thereby improving school performance (Wiliam, 2010). In their study, Burgess et al (2013) employed a difference-in-difference regression methodology to compare school effectiveness in Wales and England before and after 2001. School league tables were published for secondary schools in Wales until 2001 when it was abolished. Burgess et al (2013) found from their data that abolishing league tables in Wales significantly reduced school effectiveness in Wales in comparison to England. They, therefore, conclude that school accountability mechanisms had the potential to improve school performance. However, reviewing the data that Burgess et al (2013) used and the inferences they made, Goldstein and Leckie (2016) argued that the causal relationship that Burgess et al (2013) attributed to the school league tables is not fully supported by their research evidence. Rather they assert that any observed change is more reasonably attributed to inadequate test

practice since league tables often engendered 'test-wiseness' when students are often subjected to frequent test practice while preparing for the GCSE. In Husbands' et al. (2008) systematic review of 13 high-performing countries, school leagues tables were not found to be helpful. Against this background, some have emphasised school improvement purposes for assessment and argued that it is important for accountability to move away from being test-based so that competition and rivalry is minimised while cooperation and teamwork are maximised between schools, teachers and students (Sahlberg, 2010).

A test-based accountability system can be used by policymakers and education planners to obtain information that will guide policy development. Information from a test-based accountability system has been used to initiate system-wide improvements. In their systematic review of Government documents and international organizations' reports, Husbands et al (2008) sought to establish what assessment measures were used by 13 countries with high performing education systems and how these measures were used. They found amongst other things that national-level educational indicators which included the use of High-stakes tests, were mostly used for school monitoring, improvement, accountability and policy development. However, the evidence base for their findings is limited considering that their reviewed materials did not consider research that investigated if what was on paper reflected reality. Sometimes a test-based accountability system provides information that is used to diagnose areas of need or intervention for individual students or schools (Phelps, 2006). However, this is not common because High-stakes testing often occurs summatively i.e. at the end of a course of instruction. Therefore, any information it provides may not help the affected students who have needs or require intervention. It may however, provide direction for dealing with future students. Again, the reporting of High-stakes testing outcomes is sometimes intended to provide parents with information on how schools are faring, which they can use to make informed school choices (Bishop 2005). As for the schools, the information obtained from the High-stakes testing can stimulate them to improve their service provisions and delivery. Therefore, although a test-based accountability system promises benefits at the systemic level, it can be disempowering for teachers due to the power imbalance between policymakers/leaders and teachers (Ekoh, 2012).

2.3 LARGE SCALE ASSESSMENTS (LSAs)

The global push for more educational accountability has given rise to increased and different kinds of international, national and regional Large Scale Assessments (LSAs) with varying degrees of stakes for different educational stakeholders (Emler et al 2019; Lietz et al. 2017). In addition to High-stakes testing for test-takers, some assessments are used for High-stakes evaluation of educators, schools and education systems, which are designed to assess the extent to which academic curriculum standards have been met or not. In this section, the most prevalent large scale assessment for education systems and test-takers are discussed subsequently.

2.3.1 International and Regional Large Scale Assessments

Large Scale Assessments (LSAs) that are conducted at the international and regional level provide comparative data for participating countries (Simon et al. 2013). The LSAs inform education policies and shape the ways that education is valued and understood across countries (Addey et al., 2017; Lockheed & Wagemaker, 2013; Thomas et al. 2016). International Large Scale assessments (ILSAs) were developed and administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to enable educational performance comparisons across member countries (Addey et al., 2017). The ILSAs include the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The acceptance and prevalence of ILSAs are increasing. For instance, 32 countries participated in the PISA study for 2000 and this had increased to 79 countries by 2018. ILSAs are particularly prevalent in Western and Eastern Europe.

The Regional Large Scale assessments (RLSAs) on the other hand focuses on a particular world region. The development of the RLSAs is linked to regional associations of governmental delegations of ministry officials and experts at UNESCO, coming together to develop and administer standardised survey instruments for assessing and comparing learning outcomes

in key subjects, to countries within their specific geographical region (Kamens & Benavot, 2011). Existing RLSAs include the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), PASEC (Translated in English to be the 'Analysis Programme of the CONFEMEN Education Systems' for 13 francophone countries in West Africa) and the Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE). RLSAs are prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Kamens & Benavot, 2011). For instance, by 2009, while Sub-Saharan Africa had the least participation in ILSAs, it took the lead in participating at RLSAs (Ibid.). The regional assessments are preferred by 'developing' countries because of their political and technical advantages – cheaper administration costs, more sensitivity to context-specific peculiarities and minimised political embarrassments when low performance is reported (Kamens & Benavot, 2011).

LSAs have been found to contribute largely to an increase in data-driven educational policy and reform in many countries (Addey et al., 2017; Simon et al, 2013). For instance, Germany and Brazil implemented nationwide reforms in their education sector after experiencing poor outcomes in the PISA conducted in the year 2000 (OECD video on website)[2]. Some of the reforms include binding education standards that were measured against PISA benchmarks, compulsory all-day schooling and mandatory professional development for teachers. The positive consequences of these have been an improvement in student achievement and more inclusive education that supports at-risk learners (ibid.). In their paper which examined the consequences of participating in international and national testing, Ramirez et al (2018) found that in participating countries, access to higher education was expanded and the curriculum was broadened. They however emphasised that their findings speak only for international and national assessments which hold no stakes for the test-takers because they frame education differently from the ways that High-stakes testing does. More countries are now taking part in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or conduct national assessments because of these perceived and evidential benefits (W. Smith,

[2] http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/ How does PISA shape education reform - https://youtu.be/-xpOn0OzXEw

2016). For instance, 79 countries took part in PISA 2018 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018).

Although ILSAs and RLSAs are low-stakes for the students who write them, they have now become High-stakes for the country leaders and policymakers who have to defend student outcomes because it is increasingly perceived as an indicator of education quality or standards (Stobart & Eggen, 2012; Howie 2012). That is, it seems to provide participating countries with information about the quality of their education systems especially in relation to other countries. However, there are political and economic reasons for participation as well. Addey et al., (2017) note that European countries have an "*economic status imposed participation and that non-participation would send a signal that a country was not sufficiently committed to improving education*" (p. 440). For 'developing' countries, their credibility and eligibility for loans, aids and other material support are increased when they participate in such types of Large scale assessments (Kamens & Benavot, 2011). In fact, participation in LSAs is a condition for receiving educational aid and loans from international donors for some developing countries (Kamens & Benavot, 2011).

Although this mandated conformity to international educational norms increases these countries political and economic credibility, it raises concerns about the effect it would have on other assessments that are more reflective of such countries' contextual realities. This is because research evidence shows that ILSAs are not very context-sensitive to curriculum and pedagogical practices in the participating countries (Kamens & Benavot, 2011; Thomas et al, 2017). LSAs have also been broadly critiqued in literature since studies have linked them to a variety of unintended consequences for education systems, which reflects in a similar way the unintended consequence of High-stakes testing for test takers (Emler et al. 2019; Thomas, Gana & Munoz-Chereau, 2016). For instance, PISA has been critiqued to have negative impacts on teaching, learning, policy and practice by how it emphasises educational uniformity (Thomas, Gana & Munoz-Chereau, 2016). Drawing on literature, Emler et al. (2019) also note that LSAs can unintentionally distort the views that are held about education quality in the respective countries, in ways that subsequently engender curriculum narrowing,

teaching-to-the test and malpractices by educators. Therefore, while LSAs promise positive reforms and impact on education systems, there are growing concerns about the way it indirectly affects curriculum and pedagogy in the classroom.

2.3.2 Large Scale Assessment with High-stakes for Test takers

Then, there are national LSAs that are in-country specific and not directly comparable with other countries (Simon et al. 2013). While some are national learning assessments with no stakes for test-takers, many countries have large scale assessments with High-stakes for test-takers at different levels of their education. Since this study will focus on a High-stakes certificate examination at the level of completing secondary school, this section will focus its discussion on secondary/high school exit Certificate examinations.

Many countries conduct high-school exit examinations after upper secondary schooling essentially for certification, postsecondary progression and accountability (Dufaux, 2012; Phelps, 2006). In New Zealand, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the main secondary school qualification comprised of three certificates that are awarded at Year 11 (Level 1), Year 12 (Level 2) and Year 13 (Level 3), based on both unit and achievement standards that are specified by the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)[3]. The NCEA is a prerequisite for entrance into university, although there are other alternatives like the Cambridge International Examination (CIE) and the International Baccalaureate (Lee and Lee, 2001). However, there has been suspicion and assertion of grade inflation in the NCEA parts that are internally assessed (Powlesland, April 29, 2017). In Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) which is similar to the UK Advanced levels certifies students in the Caribbean who wish to further their studies after completing five years of secondary education. In Malawi, the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) Examination is administered to students at the end of secondary school by the Malawi National Examinations Board (Chulu, 2013). It is also a prerequisite for entrance into higher education institutions[4]. The identified challenges of administering this exam include the cost,

[3] See https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/secondary-school-and-ncea/
[4] See https://www.maneb.edu.mw/examinations/school-examinations/msce.html

political and public pressure and leakage of the examination papers (Chakwera et al. 2004). In South Africa, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination which students sit for in Grade 12 is the only standardised test for students throughout their 6 years of secondary schooling. Balwanz (2017) notes that within South Africa, the NSC is:

> *"…a ticket to further education…the indicator of choice for measuring school and education-system quality… [and] a signal that a learner has demonstrated attainment of a particular knowledge and skill" (p. 262, emphasis in original).*

This is similar to what is obtained in Ghana and Egypt. In Ghana, the West African Senior Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is sat for at the completion of secondary education (Amoako, 2019). The equivalent of the WASSCE in Egypt is the '*Thanaweya Amma' (*Gebril & Brown, 2014). Both examinations have high stakes as they influence the academic programme and institutions that students can enter. Some countries also have High-stakes examinations at the primary level of education especially for the transition into secondary schools e.g. the Primary school leaving certificate examination in Malawi.

A common type of the secondary/high school exit examination is the universal Curriculum-Based External Exit Examination Systems (universal CBEEES) which certifies all the students who have completed a secondary/high school education, and not just those planning to go onto higher education (Bishop, 2005). Universal CBEEES have explicit content standards for each subject, against which students' performance are measured. Usually, students are expected to take some compulsory subjects while they select others based on their preferences and/or aspirations. Achievement in this kind of exam is indicated by grades which signal different levels of achievement. Therefore, low achievement in the universal CBEEES does not hinder graduation from secondary/high school. In contexts that use this kind of examinations, the stakes are high for the students because their grades influence admission into higher education (including other forms of tertiary education like vocational education and training), and could have an impact on employment decisions (Bishop, 2005; Dufaux, 2012).

The stakes are also high for the schools because students' collective performance is often used for school accountability purposes and influences their reputation, resource allocation

and recognition. Nonetheless, Universal CBEEES have been positively associated with students' motivation and achievement, although some scholars argue that it impacts on teaching and learning (Dufaux, 2012). Examples of the universal CBEEES include Nigeria's secondary school exit Certificate examination, UK's GCE Advanced Levels (A-levels), Trinidad and Tobago's Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC). There is another kind of CBEEEs, which are those voluntarily subscribed to by students such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) exams, although it is seemingly compulsory to students in schools offering only this qualification. Then, there is the standards-based type of exit exams that require students to exceed a minimum standard of achievement before they can graduate from secondary/high school, such as the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in the United States (Bishop 2005; Dufaux 2012). Between 2006 and 2015, students in California public schools had to pass the CAHSEE to earn a high school diploma.

2.4 CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING

The rationale for High-stakes testing (as discussed in section 2.2 above) are typically in alignment with the intended consequences of High-stakes testing. In other words, intended consequences are linked to how test developers originally purposed for a test to be interpreted and used (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014). However, there are situations where the consequences that emerge are unintended. This section examines both the intended and unintended consequences that existing research has associated with High-stakes testing for schools, teachers, students and the wider system.

2.4.1 School Response

The intended consequence of High-stakes testing in schools is their committed response to improve student learning and achievement. For instance, schools have been known to increase remedial opportunities for students who were at-risk of failing (Holme et al. 2010). However, this sometimes engenders unintended consequences. For instance, schools have been known to increase the number of hours spent on classroom instruction in preparation for the High-stakes assessments, which puts enormous pressure on the students and cause them to easily become disillusioned with school demands. In Balwanz (2016) study, Grade 12

students in Gauteng, South Africa who were preparing for the High-stakes National School Certificate examination had to attend school on Saturdays, Sundays and during school holidays, in addition to going to school from 7 am – 4 pm every day of the week. Consequently, these students found school 'boring' and complained that they had no time for extracurricular activities. Again, schools have been known to respond to test-based accountability system by increasing the frequency and amount of testing for their students, based on the assumption that students perform better in High-stakes tests when they have more practice at testing i.e. testwiseness (Goldstein and Leckie 2016). Researchers like Rogers and Yang (1996) have found positive correlates between testwiseness and academic achievement.

High-stakes testing has been criticised for distracting rather than supporting schools (Volante, 2005). Schools have been known to expend time, energy and other resources to satisfy some of the demands of High-stakes testing, which could have been directly appropriated in helping students learn more. Schools have described the pressure of trying to meet the requirements of test-based accountability processes as stressful (Nathaniel et al. 2016). High-stakes testing can also pressure schools to engage in illegitimate activities to improve their students' performance in them. In the United States, some schools manipulated student classifications to prevent students who were at-risk of failing from taking the High-stakes exams, by increasing student retention and special needs placements (Rodriguez and Arellano, 2016; Jacob, 2005). Thus, many schools respond to High-stakes testing in ways that focus more on protecting their reputation rather than improving student learning, and this would sometimes mean that they engage in unethical practices like increased test preparations and strategic selection of who writes the exams (Holme et al 2010).

2.4.2 Teachers' Practices

High-stakes testing has been found to put pressure on teachers to ensure and improve the academic achievement of their students (Ecclestone, 2005). While this seems to be an intended consequence, teachers however respond in diverse ways to such pressure. Some teachers are motivated to do more to enhance student learning. In his study, Bishop (1998) found that teachers in High-stakes testing systems spent more time on teaching and student

consultation and were more likely to engage in classroom activities that enhanced learning such as the conduct of experiments. For some teachers, High-stakes testing made their job easier by giving them clear targets to aim for (Madaus & Russell, 2010; Bishop 2005). While this may be intended and seemingly positive, it is not unproblematic because tests often measure a sample of the general domain of what students should know (Linn 1998). Thus, some teachers have responded to High-stakes testing by focusing on the needs of the High-stakes testing process rather than on the needs of the students (Lingard, 2007; Polesel, Dulfer & Turnbull, 2012; Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Polesel, Rice & Dulfer, 2014; Bishop 2005). For instance, when teachers and schools were evaluated and rewarded or penalised based on the performance of their pupils in the National Curriculum Tests in England, West (2010) and Reay and Wiliam (1999) report how the focus in teacher practices shifted from improving learning to improving examination results. Nonetheless, Au (2007) found studies where High-stakes testing was purported to have engendered learner-centred pedagogies and the expansion of curricular content, in his systematic review.

With unintended consequences, literature abounds with instances where High-stakes testing engendered curriculum narrowing and teaching to the test practices (Eggen & Stobart, 2015; Ford, 2018). Curricular content is narrowed to subject areas that are tested, while topics and subjects that are not likely to be assessed are neglected and eventually crowded out of the taught content. Narrowing of the curriculum in response to High-stakes testing has been found in Australia, Chile and the Republic of Korea (UNESCO, 2017). Some teachers have been pressured to teach curricular content in similar ways to how the tests present and assess them; that is, "*as isolated and largely unconnected facts and pieces of information*" (Polesel et al. 2012, p.5). The consequence of this is the fragmentation of knowledge into isolated test-related facts or the discretization of curricula knowledge into fragments that are test-friendly but not holistically continuous for learning (Howie, 2012; Lamprianou 2012; Berliner, 2011; Koretz, 2008; Au, 2008, 2007; Jones, 2007).

Again, some teachers rather spend more time on teaching test-taking strategies using practice tests (Bosan, 2018; Dufaux, 2012). In Ghana, High-stakes testing was affirmed by teachers to

shape what they taught and how they taught their students in two different descriptive surveys by Amoako (2019) and Anane (2010). These changes in teacher practices engender a teacher-centred, fact-driven pedagogy and the crowding out of assessments that should be formative in function (Harlen & Crick, 2002, Amoako, 2019). In Pakistan, Adnan and Mahmood (2014) investigated the consequences that the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) examination had on teaching and learning English Language using questionnaires that were administered to 50 teachers. Their findings reveal that the HSSC exam affected the materials and method that the teachers used in their classrooms. The focus was usually on extensive practice for the exam and an emphasis on the content that was tested in the exam. The teachers in the study acknowledged a conflict between teaching according to the HSSC required pattern and the students' learning needs. Unfortunately, priority is always given to the HSSC required pattern. The consequence of this is that students who learn better through student-centred, creative pedagogy are put at a disadvantage. Then there are instances where teachers respond to High-stakes testing by engaging in inappropriate practices to improve student achievement (West 2010). In the United States, some teachers have been known to shift their focus to pupils who were more likely to do well in the High-stakes test, while neglecting those who needed instruction the most, thereby disadvantaging the weaker students (Jennings and Sohn, 2014; UNESCO, 2017).

Figure 2: Consequences of High-stakes testing on Teachers

Source: Global education monitoring report (UNESCO 2017)

In his qualitative study of how High-stakes testing impacted the teaching practices of 10 Mathematics teachers in Kaduna State, North Central, Nigeria, Bosan (2018) found several instances of the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) influencing the teachers' instructional practices. He had observed the classroom lessons of the selected teachers, conducted in-depth interviews with them and analysed official documents. His research found the dominance of teacher-centred pedagogic methods accompanied by speedy efforts to cover all the expected curricula content in the exam. This meant that the likelihood of not giving adequate attention to each topic content was high. The teachers however justified their responses by highlighting contextual realities of large class sizes, impending examination deadlines and a demanding teaching workload. Thus, the demands of the WASSCE were used to legitimise the ways that the Mathematics' Teachers structured their classroom teaching activities. The teachers also spent a lot of time drilling the students on past examination questions, while focusing on how the students should memorise the solution procedures to be regurgitated during the examination. The consequence of these was poor engagement and limited opportunities on the part of the students to deeply understand the curricular content. Considering the sample size (10), characteristics (all teachers were from public schools) and use of only qualitative methods for data collection, Bosan (2018) study may not have adequately and accurately captured the effect of High-stakes testing on the teachers' instructional practices. This PhD study improved on the weaknesses of Bosan (2018) by incorporating the use of questionnaires as a follow-up to the qualitative phase of collecting data, selection of research participants with backgrounds from public and private schools, while giving primacy to the test-takers themselves rather than their teachers, using a Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) design.

2.4.3 Student Experience

Literature has shown that High-stakes testing can have an impact on students' identities and lived experiences of schooling in ways that are both intended and unintended. This impact is enabled by widespread acceptance of the idea of meritocracy, which inherently enforces and reproduces structural inequalities in the outcomes of the High-stakes assessment (Au, 2009, 2013; Jones et al., 2012). The inequalities that arise from disparities in socioeconomic status,

educational experiences, class and gender etc. eventually spills into how the tests differentially affect the students (Balwanz, 2016). The effect of High-stakes testing on student experience link to the key focus of this study. In the following sub-sections, the kind of consequences that High-stakes testing has been shown to have on students' learning, academic achievement and emotions are discussed.

2.4.3.1 Learning

Some studies have shown that High-stakes testing can negatively impact on student learning experiences in schools (Kwon et. al. 2015; Posti-Ahokas & Lehtomäki, 2014; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Smyth & Banks, 2012; Berliner, 2011; Koretz, 2008; Stobart 2008; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007). This is particularly so for those who are disadvantaged and have challenges like learning and physical disabilities (Tefera, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). Literature evidence shows that High-stakes testing can constrain the range of skills that students acquire, promote low-level or shallow thinking, decrease conceptual and innovative learning while encouraging an emphasis on outcomes over the learning process (Polese et al. 2012; Sahlberg, 2010). In their study, Elwood et al. (2015) found that students narrowed their learning experiences themselves to what was being tested in the Irish Leaving Certificate (LC). They had conducted 13 group interviews with 81 secondary school students who were preparing for the LC and found that in preparing for the LC exams, the students exercised personal agency in the choices they made about what to learn, how to learn, with what to learn and how much to learn, in ways that focused on what was tested at the Irish LC. Elwood et. al. (2015) described this phenomenon as '*Learning-to-the-test*' (p. 14). *Learning-to-the-test* can engender shallow and limited learning when it constrains students to just focus on tested knowledge (West, 2010). In the Balwanz (2016) study, a participant described one of the ways that 'learning-to-the-test' supports shallow learning:

> *To pass is so easy because you can pass without understanding something…there is this method we call it 'CPF (Cram, Pass, Forget)'. That is what we mostly do. So we say tomorrow morning I'll be writing such test, so I just have to cram and then I pass, and I forget, without understanding" (Interviewee in Grade 12, Balwanz, 2016 p. 270).*

Balwanz had interviewed 14 high achieving students from Grades 11 and 12, and 9 secondary school dropouts in vocational education, using an interview protocol and a card sort. He also interviewed 7 teachers and 6 staff at the district and policy level.

Again, High-stakes testing tends to legitimise tested knowledge as powerful knowledge while rendering untested knowledge seemingly unimportant (Bosan, 2018; Polesel et al. 2012; 2014). This limits the opportunity for students to learn things, that though untested, can be very useful either in the short or long term (Linn 1998). In her study of the impact of the HSSC exam on learning English Language in Pakistan, Jilani (2009) argued that the exam engendered a pursuit of superficial goals, that is, high scores rather than learning the language (p. 181). Nonetheless, High-stakes testing can motivate students to learn and engage with curricular content whether through a fear of failure or a desire for success (World Bank, 2008). However, this kind of learning has been described by Ekoh (2012) as mostly superficial because it involves a low engagement with what is being learnt, since it can engender learning to solely pass examinations. It is therefore not surprising that many students easily forget what they have learnt after the examinations are over (Balwanz, 2016; Elwood, 2015).

Another perspective on the impact of High-stakes testing on students' learning experience is how it can influence the values that students hold about learning. In her Master's dissertation, Ekoh (2012) examined the consequences of High-stakes testing practices on educational values and development in Nigeria. The educational values that had been associated with Nigeria's education system include communalism, experiential learning, physiological development and practical knowledge. Ekoh (2012) argues that High-stakes testing negatively impacted on these values. In their study, De Lisle and McMillan-Solomon (2017) investigated the unintended consequences of the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), a High-stakes examination for selection and placement into secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The multi-method qualitative study captured the experiences of pupils who were preparing for the High-stakes examination, using focus group interviews, diaries, drawings by participants, photovoice and photo-elicitation. They found that the emotional investment required to prepare for the examination ultimately led to a decrease in the pupils' love for learning. The

preparation for the exam also altered their relationships with the significant others in their lives. For instance, parents became more focused on their academic performance and there was an increasingly competitive culture amongst their peers. Nonetheless, High-stakes testing has been identified to provide test takers with information on how to improve their effort towards learning (Sloane & Kelly, 2003).

2.4.3.2 Academic Achievement

As earlier discussed, increasing academic achievement is an intended consequence of High-stakes testing in many contexts (Holme et. al 2010). However, there are inconsistencies in the literature about the relationship between High-stakes testing and student achievement. For instance, in the United States where there is a preponderance of literature on the consequences of High-stakes testing, studies like NAEP (2012) and Rosenshine (2003) found positive associations between High-stakes testing and increase in academic achievement. However, some other studies (e.g. Berliner, 2011; Nichols et al. 2012; 2006; Amrein-Beardsley & Berliner, 2002; Jacob 2001) did not find strong effects of High-stakes testing on student achievement. In subjects where there were effects, they argue that it was due to construct-irrelevant variances associated with increasing familiarity with the questions and teachers teaching to the test, and not necessarily an increase in teachers and students' effort towards improving learning.

In a systematic review of 46 research studies, Holme et al. (2010) investigated the positive and negative consequences of High School Exit Examinations (HSEE) in the United States. They had focused on four domains of intended consequences - student achievement, school response, graduation and postsecondary outcomes – for these examinations. For student achievement, they note that their review "*points to a lack of overall achievement effect*" (p. 491). For graduation, their studies found some negative consequences especially in relation to an increase in students dropping out. Finally, concerning postsecondary outcomes, Holme et al (2010) did not find any consequences, whether positive or negative of the examination. When High-stakes testing does have negative effects, it is disproportionately higher for students who are low-achievers or are at risk of low achievement (Jones, 2007; Amrein &

Berliner, 2002; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002). Students in these categories such as those with learning, behavioural and language difficulties or those disadvantaged by their economic or racial/ethnic backgrounds continue to underperform in the High-stakes tests when compared to their counterparts (Horn, 2003; Tefera, 2011; Ou, 2010). Positive associations have also been found between High-stakes testing and increased grade retention, dropping-out, exclusion and high failure rates amongst the lower ability students (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2013; Farrington, 2008; Amrein and Berliner, 2003; Jacob, 2001). The differential impact of High-stakes testing on academic achievement might be connected to how academic achievement depends on several factors outside High-stakes testing. Some students will thrive under the pressure that High-stakes testing promotes, while some students would be constrained by the environment that High-stakes testing engenders.

2.4.3.3 Emotional Impact

Literature suggests that High-stakes testing can have an impact on students' self-esteem, anxiety level and stress (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; von der Embse and Witmer, 2014; Polesel et al. 2012; 2014). This is exacerbated by the meritocracy ideology. According to Crawford (2010, p. 10):

> *The discourse of a meritocracy places individual responsibility at the heart of explanations for success and failure where unequal outcomes are seen as a consequence of personal shortcomings rather than the result of cultural, socio-economically institutionalised and structural inequalities.*

This is why the experience of failure in High-stakes examinations always have an emotional impact such as a loss of confidence in the ability to learn, a loss of motivation to try harder and an unwillingness or inability to continue with educational pursuits (Dufaux, 2012). In a study by Kruger et. al (2016), their participants described how failing a high school exit examination negatively affected their emotions, the way they perceived themselves, how others perceived them as well as altered their goals. However, it spurred some of them to put in more effort into their academic pursuits. Kruger et. Al (2016) had used a qualitative research framework to explore the psychological impact of failing repeatedly in New England's High School Exit Exam, as perceived by eight (8) English Language Learners (ELL) that failed the exam. The emotional impact of failing a High-stakes test is sometimes mediated by the schools. In her research, Farrington (2008) found that the experiences of failure across

two schools were very different, a difference that emanated from the failure thresholds and the remedial provisions that were in place at both schools. Farrington (2008) therefore concludes that the way that teachers and school administrators construct failure, shapes the messages that they pass across to students about academic failure, which in turn determine students' responses to failure and future consequences. Some students begin to "*value themselves and construct their emerging identities in relation to narrow definitions of academic success"* (Reay & Wiliam, 1999, p. 346).

Failing a High-stakes exam (potentially or actually) can also lead to some students choosing to drop out of school pursuits. Using a regression discontinuity analysis framework in another US study, Ou (2010) examined the impact of the closeness to the pass/fail cutoff in New Jersey's High School Exit Exam (HSEE) on students' decisions to complete or drop out of high school. She found that students who barely failed the exam were statistically more likely to drop out than students who barely passed it. This finding was similar to that of Papay et al. (2008) for Massachusetts (US) and Machin et. al. (2016) for GCSE English in England (UK). However, Reardon et al. (2010) found no significant positive or negative effect of failing the HSEE exam on the motivation to drop out or complete high school for California (US) students, using a regression discontinuity framework as well. These varied findings suggest that the consequences of High-stakes tests identified in one context may not apply to another context.

Machin et al. (2016) also found that students at the unfavourable ends of critical pass/fail boundaries were less likely to go on to higher education. Using a regression discontinuity framework, Machin et al. (2016) had followed a cohort of 16-year-olds students on the threshold of the grade C in GCSE English for two years, and compared the post-compulsory education trajectory of those who narrowly made the C grade with those who narrowly fell short of the C grade. They concluded that although both categories of students have approximate ability; their educational trajectories in terms of institution attended, courses taken and exam outcomes (obtained from the Key Stage 5 data and the Individualised Learner Record) are significantly different; because of the threshold that demarcates them, initiating long-term negative consequences, which reinforce the inequality that is embedded in educational assessment. Strikingly, these quantitative findings do not enrich our

understanding of the nature of these consequences and how they play out, beyond what was extrapolated statistically. This is why this study adopted a mixed methods design anticipating that the nature of consequences can also be addressed with qualitative data.

2.4.4. System Impact

2.4.4.1 Shadow Education / Private Tutoring

One of the ways that High-stakes testing impacts on the wider system is the growth of a shadow education or private tutoring system where private individuals or establishments offer paid, private, out-of-school lessons (after school/weekend) to supplement mainstream lessons (Bray 2003; 2013; Guill & Lintorf, 2019; Putkiewicz, 2006). Private tutoring helps students improve on their weaknesses and be more equipped to achieve better in examinations (Dedić, Jokić, & Jurko, 2006). It also generates income for its providers and serves as one of the ways to engage children pending when their carers return (Putkiewicz, 2006). Private tutoring is a widespread phenomenon globally and High-stakes testing has been indicted as one of the factors responsible for this (Dedić et al., 2006; Guill & Lintorf, 2019). In countries like Singapore, Australia, India and Hong Kong, High-stakes examinations are the cause of the growth of private tutoring, since individuals tend to depend more on private tutoring in education systems that depend on examinations (Bray, 2003). Stobart & Eggen (2012) note that the Chinese Imperial Examination System for civil service selection, as old as two thousand years ago also had to deal with the development of a private tutoring industry that privileged the better off. In his book, Bray (2003) draws on evidence to show how private tutoring is caused by cultural, economic and educational factors. Private tutoring has been found to be pervasive in cultural contexts that are either competitive or value effort. Similar tendencies have been observed in contexts where teachers are poorly remunerated and/or the economic benefits from private tutoring is high.

In her paper, Putkiewicz (2006) investigated the phenomenon of 'Private Tutoring in Poland', by analysing data from a study that was conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) in Poland. The IPA collected quantitative data from 849 students who were in the Law and Pedagogies faculties and in their first year of study at the Universities of Warsaw and

Białystok, in addition to qualitative data from various sources and using varied methods. From the quantitative data, about 52% of the respondents reported that they received private tutoring to prepare themselves for secondary school examinations. From 1999, students at the lower secondary school write a High-stakes test to gain access into upper secondary schools. At the end of upper secondary school, students who intend to go onto higher education must write an exit examination commonly called the 'matura'. For some faculties, there were additional university entrance examinations, although the matura was designed to replace them from 2005. Against this background, Putkiewicz (2006) therefore argued that the pressure to do well in these High-stakes examinations engendered the proliferation of private tutoring in Poland. She also argued that Private tutoring increased social inequalities in education and was prone to corrupt practices. Although her data does not adequately provide evidence of private tutoring being riddled with corrupt practices, there is a strong connection between Poland's High-stakes examinations and the preponderance of private tutoring.

In a similar study in Kazakstan, which also administered surveys to first year university students (1004 of them), Kalikova and Rakhimzhanova (2009) also found similar links between High-stakes examinations and private tutoring. In Egypt, due to the High-stakes of the *thanaweya amma (General Secondary Education Certificate examination)*, private Tutoring thrives. The Egyptian national statistics reveal that the expenditure on private Tutoring is higher than the expenditure on school tuition fees (Gebril & Brown, 2014; Pallegedara & Mottaleb, 2018). In her study of the washback effect of the HSSC exam in Pakistan, Jilani (2009) highlighted how "*this examination system has mushroomed privately run exam preparation centres (popularly called 'coaching centres') and English language learning centres*" (Jilani, 2009, p. 121). In their survey research of private tutoring in 9 countries – Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Mongolia, Lithuania, Georgia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Azerbaijan - Dedić et al. (2006) found that the growth of private tutoring was linked to perceptions that it provided a high quality of education and increased academic achievement. However, they found that it exacerbated social inequalities since it is more readily available to those who are better off and more privileged (Bray, 2003). Thus, some countries have found links between High-stakes testing and private tutoring, which further fostered corrupt

practices by teachers and other providers who benefit financially from it, so that it is constantly in demand. For instance, some teachers shy from teaching in mainstream classes so that their private tutoring ventures can be patronised. Thus, while private tutoring emerged as a solution to the problem of meeting the challenges of doing well in High-stakes examinations, it can become a platform for unintended consequences like corrupt practices to thrive.

2.4.4.2 Examination Malpractices

> *"The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor." (Campbell's Law, Donald T. Campbell, 1976)*

When the outcomes of examinations have High-stakes for students, teachers and schools, they expectedly embark on strategic actions to enhance their outcomes (Scheerens et al. 2003). The 2015 Global Education Monitoring report notes that sometimes, the strategic actions could be deliberate attempts to game or manipulate the system to their advantage. Literature abounds with instances where the desire to excel in High-stakes testing had influenced some schools, educators, parents and students to respond in seemingly illicit and inappropriate ways. In his study into why and how students cheat in Kenya's public examinations, Kagete (2008) found that the competitiveness within the system engendered malpractices. Getting admission into higher education and getting a job after higher education was competitive, while the publishing of league tables that ranked schools, districts and provinces based on academic performance in the exam promoted an ambience of competitiveness.

As earlier noted, competition can be healthy but High-stakes testing can also engender unhealthy competition where illicit methods are employed to give an advantage. An instance is test score inflation, which is an improvement in test scores that is not commensurate with the improvement in learning that it suggests (Koretz, 2008; 2005). Test score inflation has been linked to inappropriate pedagogic practices such as replacing instruction with test

preparation activities, as mentioned in section 2.4.2. Test preparation activities corrupt or undermine the construct that a test is intended to measure (Koretz, 2008). Test score inflation can also occur by the overrating of students' performance in school-based assessments or teacher assessed parts of the assessment (Scheerens et al. 2003). Some other times, test score inflation occurs when teachers cheat. This happens when teachers give their students access to test items in advance, assist their students inappropriately during the tests (e.g. extra time, explanations etc.) or change their students' incorrect answers after the tests (Koretz, 2005). Sometimes, teachers profit financially from the students for test score inflations.

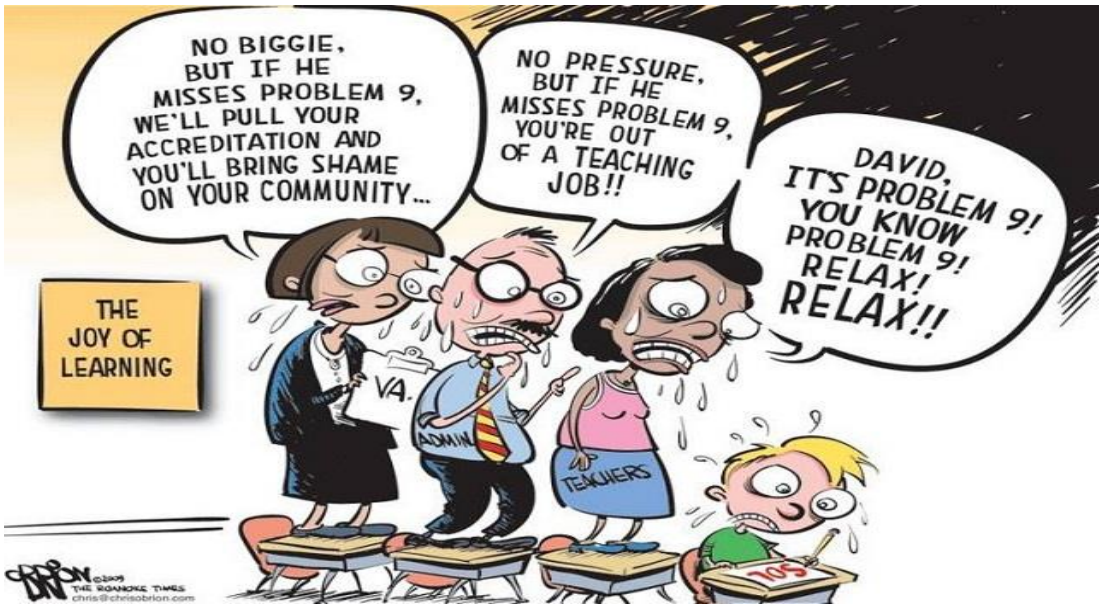
In his Doctoral dissertation which investigated the perceived causes of examination malpractices in Malawi, Makaula (2018) found a strong "*desire among students to pass examinations at all costs*" (p. 184) in addition to other factors. He had used a Mixed Methods design which collected data using questionnaires that were administered to 200 students, a focus group with students and another focus group with teachers. Makaula (2018) notes that examination malpractices continue to be pervasive in the Malawian education system. In the UK, the Standards & Testing Agency investigated 516, 524 and 599 cases of alleged maladministration in the Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) national curriculum assessments in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively. The cases comprised different actions that included inappropriate coaching of pupils, over-aiding pupils and inflation/deflation of teacher assessment (TA) judgements. The most common allegation type in both Key Stages and across the three years was the over-aiding of pupils by test administrators, although this may have been necessitated by unclear guidelines or instructions (Standards & Testing Agency 2018; 2017). Therefore, "*results that do not reflect the unaided abilities and achievements of pupils*" (Standards & Testing Agency 2018, p. 3) in the National assessments (KS1 and KS2) continues to be amended or annulled because of some of these malpractices indulged in by teachers. Sometimes, the malpractices are indulged in by the students themselves and occasionally with the assistance of their parents/guardians. Emiloju & Adeyoju (2012), Chakwera et al (2004) and Adow et al. (2015) identified copying from others, smuggling external materials into exams, impersonation, collusion with officials, bribery and so on as some of the malpractices identified in Nigeria, Malawi and Kenya respectively.

Furthermore, leakages of question scripts before exams, trading of exam grades, corrupt conniving between school and exam officials are some of the washback effects that have been identified in High-stakes testing systems (Barrett, 2009).

2.4.5 The Missing Link

The four levels at which consequences of High-stakes testing has been encountered in the literature are interconnected. Government give imperatives and policies on High-stakes assessments. Schools and teachers respond to these government imperatives and policies on High-stakes assessments. Government hold schools and teachers accountable for outcomes in the High-stakes assessments using tools like league tables or performance-related pay. This makes the assessments High-stakes for schools and teachers. Schools and teachers then pressure the students and/or alter the teaching-learning experience and/or game the process in ways that influence students' experiences of the High-stakes examinations. Students respond to the pressure from schools and teachers by subscribing to the systemic response to High-stakes testing. This is linked to this study which explores how the experiences and aspirations of secondary school leavers are influenced by High-stakes testing within their systemic contexts. The systemic context in this study refers to Nigeria's education system.

Figure 3: The cycle of High-stakes testing



Source: https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/the-perils-of-standardized-testing/

Although researchers like Adegoke (2017), Bosan (2018) and Ekoh (2012) have critically appraised the impact of High-stakes testing within the Nigerian context, the missing link is the dearth of research that have investigated the consequences of High-stakes testing through the test takers' worldview especially after experiencing the High-stakes assessments. Adegoke (2017) investigated the perceived impact of High-stakes examinations on the teaching and learning of Physics in secondary schools. Bosan (2018) investigated the consequences of High-stakes assessments on the practices of secondary school Mathematics teachers. Ekoh (2012) on the other hand did a critical appraisal of how High-stakes testing shapes educational values and development in Nigeria. This under-researched aspect of High-stakes testing is also reflective of the wider pattern in global literature because little is known about how High-stakes testing affects test-takers after experiencing High-stakes tests/examinations. Examining this aspect in the Nigerian context, this study seeks to address the missing link by presenting new original evidence that contributes to a better understanding of the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for students aspiring to higher education, while including their voice in the debates on the consequences of High-stakes testing.

2.5 HIGH-STAKES TESTING FOR REALISING ASPIRATIONS

One of the previously highlighted rationales and intended consequence of High-stakes testing is its use as a seemingly accurate and objective tool for selection, a rationale that is underpinned by the idea of meritocracy (Cresswell, 2000). Thus, many countries use the results from High-stakes examinations to decide if an individual is suitable to be selected into a higher level of education. For instance, university entrance examinations are used to determine if an aspiration to go to a preferred university would materialise. Again, the outcomes from High-stakes examinations sometimes inform selection into career-related endeavours. The secondary school leavers whose lived experiences of High-stakes testing were explored in this study were aspiring to go onto higher education. Aspirations capture the various future preferences, wants and choices of people (Appadurai, 2013/2004). They express the hopes and ambitions that people hold for themselves and/or others (Archer & DeWitt 2017). Aspirations are usually positioned in terms of whether they are career-related or education-related. In this study, the aspiration of interest relates to participation in and

preferences for higher education. Research has shown that wider social structures can put constraints on the opportunities to realise aspirations (DeJaeghere, 2018; Prodonovich et. al. 2014). High-stakes examinations are part of the social structures that students aspiring to go onto higher education must navigate to realise their aspirations, in many countries of the world.

2.5.1 Impact of High-stakes testing on aspirations

The impact of High-stakes testing on higher education aspiration has not been researched much. Two studies - Rodriguez & Arellano (2016) and Klinger & Luce-Kapler (2007), however offered some insight. In their study, Rodriguez and Arellano (2016) found that Latina/o students were more likely to enrol in 2-year community colleges rather than at the 4-year degree awarding colleges that they claim to aspire to, due to their academic performance in the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). They had explored the effects of High-stakes testing on the college aspirations and subsequent enrolment of Latina/o students at six high schools in a Californian district. The High-stakes test in focus was the California High School Exit Exam [CAHSEE] and they collected data using a survey, student report and individual academic curriculum. Then, there were instances of repeated exam attempts which took its toll psychologically and emotionally on the affected students (Rodriguez & Arellano, 2016). Unfortunately, the study did not account for individual characteristics as the survey outcomes were only available at the aggregate high school level rather than at the individual student level.

In the study by Klinger and Luce-Kapler (2007), they had collected qualitative data (using interviews and focus group discussions) from successful and unsuccessful students in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), a High-stakes literacy exam in Canada for high school graduation to explore their perceptions of the exam. They found distinct differences between them in their aspirations for higher education. For the successful students, going onto higher education was spoken about with certainty and the foreseen impact of the exam for them was in determining the location and direction of their studies. The unsuccessful students, on the other hand, did not consider higher education as a given.

For them, higher education was a potential option dependent on their level of success in the exam. Both studies above emphasise how the outcomes that students experience in High-stakes examinations influence the way that High-stakes testing affects educational aspirations. While young people's educational aspirations may not accurately predict their future, it can provide a reasonable approximation of their future participation and behaviour in higher education (Archer & DeWitt 2017; Prodonovich et. al. 2014). Against this background, this PhD study explored the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for young people who have aspirations to go onto higher education.

2.5.2 Understanding Aspirations

Since this study is investigating the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing from the perspectives and experiences of young people aspiring to higher education, it is important to explore the notion of aspiration. The starting point for this study is that aspiration is socially constructed and historically situated (see Hoskins & Baker, 2017; Gutman & Akerman, 2008; L. Archer & DeWitt, 2017). Theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Arjun Appadurai have situated aspirations within culture. However, Appadurai (2013) specifically situates aspiration within people's understanding and cultural definition of the "good life" (p. 188), thereby accommodating the different dimensions and possibilities for aspirations. For Baillergeau and Dyvendak (2019), this makes Appadurai's conception of aspirations holistic. Thus, aspirational wants, preferences and ideas of the future are formed, nurtured and embedded in culture (Appadurai, 2013). Furthermore, Gale and Parker (2015) note that Appadurai's conception of aspiration is more dynamic than that of Bourdieu because he emphasises the place of the future in the formation and negotiation of aspiration, through the concept 'Capacity to Aspire', which Appadurai states that it is both a cultural and navigational capacity.

As a cultural capacity, aspiration is "*always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life*" (Ibid. p. 187) and with an orientation towards the future. As a result, it thrives on experiential practice, repetitions and the possibilities of real-life speculations. Thus, Those who are more privileged in terms of material resources, power and status have a capacity to aspire that is more fully developed than their less privileged counterparts because they have more

opportunities for such experiential practice and real-world experiments of their imagined futures. The less privileged on the other hand must contend with limited opportunities and experiences. Thus, while they do not suffer from a poverty of aspirations, they do suffer from a poverty of the capacity to aspire, which Appadurai describes as "*a more brittle horizon of aspirations*" (p. 189). As a navigational capacity, the capacity to aspire is a combination of "means and ends, values and strategies, experiences and tested insights" (Appadurai 2013, p. 189), that are oriented towards the future. It involves using all these resources to navigate the complex pathways between where individuals are and where they want to be. As a navigational capacity, the capacity to aspire is dynamic as it can change and accommodate change.

In their study, Strand and Winston (2008) used Appadurai's framing of the capacity to aspire as a cultural capacity to understand the factors which influenced the nature and levels of educational aspirations in pupils aged 12 - 14. They had collected data using a questionnaire from 800 pupils and focus group discussion from a sub-sample of 48 pupils from five comprehensive secondary schools located in an inner urban area of the UK. They found that ethnicity had a greater influence than year group and gender in the nature and level of their educational aspirations. Home educational aspirations, which they described as the level of participation in postsecondary education and thoughts about the importance of school within the home, was the key mediator of the difference in aspirations across the different ethnic groups. This links to Appadurai's emphasis on how aspirations emerge from culture. Strand and Winston (2008) argue that different ethnic groups provide different levels of guidance on how to navigate the pathways that connect school endeavours with career choices. Therefore, some ethnic groups can be said to "*explore the future more frequently and more realistically*" (Appadurai 2013/2004, p. 188) than others. They suggest that the school as a cultural institution can take the role of the home for ethnic groups that lack the navigational capacity to aspire. It is however problematic to define educational aspirations, whether loosely or tightly around the notions of ethnic groupings because of the constant flux in the composition of ethnic group characteristics. Appadurai rightly pointed out that culture is interactive because it has weak boundaries.

Drawing on Appadurai's capacity to aspire as well as Bourdieu's ideas, Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2019) sought to understand how and why the capacity to aspire changes over time. Their research project had encountered disadvantaged youth in the Netherlands, Belgium and France who were silent, dismissive, cynical and uneasy when asked questions about their future. They argue that many young people have an 'incapacity to aspire', which they describe as a situation where individuals find it daunting to think and express aspirations for the future because their "*dreams have withered away"* (Ibid. p. 3*)* over time. Theorising a micro-sociological framework for how aspirations change over time, Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2019) conclude that:

> *Young people's capacity to aspire is thus influenced by social position and status as well as by exposure to daily interactions that broaden their horizon of future possibilities, provided by parents and other adult role models, educational and social policies, extra- curricular activities and community initiatives. These interactions become opportunities which, when seized, can contribute to the development of a plan. But at other times, interactions may not provide such opportunities, or at least opportunities that can be seized. In such cases, social interactions can undermine the development of the capacity to aspire, due to the emergence of tensions (p. 9).*

Gale & Parker (2015) on the other hand, used Appadurai's 'capacity to aspire' as well as de Certeau's (1984) 'map and tour knowledges' to elaborate on Bourdieu's explanations for the formation of students' aspirations. They had studied the higher education aspirations of 244 secondary school students from disadvantaged backgrounds in regional Australia, by analysing their responses to The Australian Survey of Student Aspirations (TASSA). Their study provided empirical support for Bourdieu's (1986) argument that the structural limits on people's aspirations apply differently to different people depending on their economic, cultural and social capital.

For Gale and Parker (2015), Bourdieu's theories were necessary to fully account for the structural impact of disadvantage on aspirations, while Appadurai's conception of the capacity to aspire as a navigational capacity provided a fuller account of the importance of agency, in their study. Despite this seeming balance and dialogue between both theorists, they emphasise that "*the constraints of structure are not simply addressed by adding accounts*

of agency" (Gale & Parker 2015, p. 89). They therefore recommend the replacement or revision of the cultural norms that dominate social lives and put people at a disadvantage, in ways that are "*mutually beneficial to the advantaged and disadvantaged*" (Gale and Parker 2015, p. 93). Similarly, Bok (2010) investigated the social and cultural factors that shaped the aspirations of primary school pupils aged 11 and 12 in an Australian capital city, using a theoretical framework that was derived from Appadurai's conception of aspiration as a cultural capacity and Bourdieu's social theory of reproduction. Bok (2010) found that "transgenerational experiences" (p. 176) in the home, school support for academic achievement and access to information in the local community and beyond, were important in shaping the future that the students imagined for themselves.

For Fray et al. (2020), the aspirations of young people for higher education in Australia were shaped by six factors namely cost and distance, schooling and academic achievement, knowledge of post-secondary pathways, home and community attachments, supportive home and community environment, and individual characteristics; in descending order of prevalence. Fray et al. (2020) had reviewed 65 empirical studies that were published between 1991 and 2016, which examined the aspirations for higher education of Australian students from regional and remote areas. This category of students is considered underrepresented in Australian higher education and Australian literature shows that many of them do not aspire to jobs that require a university degree when compared to their peers from metropolitan Australia. The main data collection instruments across the reviewed studies were questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions, although one study used enrolment data of the application cohorts for three regional universities. The participants in these studies were mainly secondary school students, although some studies involved primary school pupils, university students and staff, teachers, administrators, parents and policymakers.

Cost and distance were indicted in more than half of the reviewed publications and it included financial considerations in relation to university tuition, accommodation, relocation, transport as well as proximity to home/communities. Concerning schooling and academic

achievement, the main characteristics that shape the aspirations for higher education were secondary school experiences and supportive provisions, teacher expectations and relationships, as well as prior academic achievement. For these students who lived in remote and regional areas of Australia, 31 publications found that many of them had limited knowledge of the types, routes and requirements for higher education. Attachment to the home and community emerged from a strong sense of responsibility, community and desired proximity to family and friends. A supportive environment was linked to parental attitude, educational background and aspirational preferences as well as an assurance of financial support from the home. Peers, close relatives as well as local community expectations and culture contributed to defining the kind of support that influenced the students' aspirations for HE. With regards to individual characteristics, gender and the indigenous status of the students played key roles in how their aspirations for higher education was influenced. However, there are contradictory findings, and this is expected because students from the regional and remote areas of Australia are not a homogenous population and as Fray et al (2020) highlight, the geographical boundaries and descriptions were used broadly in the reviewed publications.

In their study, Archer & Dewitt (2017) also found that ethnicity, alongside other social structures like gender and class, played significant roles in shaping young people's aspirations. Their study investigated the factors that influenced the science career aspirations of children aged 10 – 14 using an intersectional approach that integrated critical theories on identity with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. They conducted online surveys on about 18,000 students, as well as longitudinal interviews with 83 of them and 74 parents, over a 5-year period. Although, the project that informed the study focused on science career aspirations, the aspirations of their participants extended beyond science careers. From their interview data, they found that the family habitus, which they define as "*the ways in which families think, conceive of themselves and operate*" (p. 79) play important roles in how young people view the possibility and desirability of science career aspirations. Other factors that shaped aspirations were individual interests and hobbies outside school as well as in-school activities, television and perceived financial prospects. From their survey data, they found classed, racialised and gendered patterns in their respondents' aspirations. For instance,

children from a higher social class were more likely to aspire to elite careers like Medicine, while girls were more likely than the boys to aspire to careers in the Arts.

In their study, Reid & McCallum (2014) found that the educational aspirations of economically disadvantaged students in South Australia were influenced by positive affective relationships with teachers and their schooling experiences. They had collected qualitative data using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, visual methods and a storying activity from five students aged 14 - 15 in a public secondary school. Despite their low socio-economic background, the research participants in their study held high aspirations for their future. Using Appadurai's capacity to aspire as an analytic framework, Reid and McCallum (2014) demonstrate that the positive trust relationship that the research participants have with their teachers strengthened their capacity to aspire.

Appadurai's 'capacity to aspire' is connected to Amartya Sen's notion of capability. Sen defines capabilities in terms of the freedoms that individuals have to choose and achieve the kind of lives that they hold valuable (Hart 2012). Appadurai notes that the capacity to aspire and Sen's notion of capabilities are "*two sides of the same coin",* because:

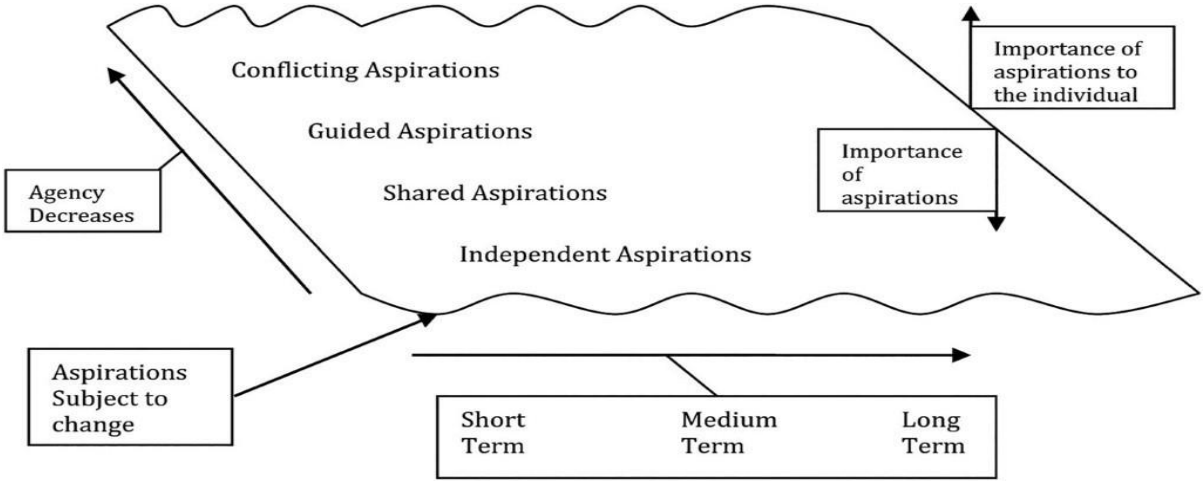
> *The capacity to aspire provides an ethical horizon within which more concrete capabilities can be given meaning, substance and sustainability. Conversely, the exercise and nurture of these capabilities verifies and authorises the capacity to aspire and moves it away from wishful thinking to thoughtful wishing (p. 193).*

Aspiration as a capability, therefore, focuses on the commitment to achieve a particular end goal. Drawing connections between Amartya Sen's notion of 'capability' and Bourdieu's notion of 'capital', Hart (2012) conceptualised a relationship between aspirations and capabilities using concepts she referred to as the 'Capability to Aspire (CTA)' and the 'Capability to Realise (CTR)' aspirations, to understand young people's aspirations and how England's widening participation policy influenced the achievement of these aspirations from two research studies. Hart (2012) described the Capability to Aspire (CTA) as the genuine freedom to choose what to aspire to while the Capability to Realise (CTR) aspiration is the genuine freedom to achieve what is aspired. Hart's studies are now discussed in detail.

Hart's first research study was conducted with Year 10 (aged 14-15) and Year 12 (aged 16 – 17) students at a secondary school in South Bradford, UK between 2003 and 2004. Data was collected using a self-completion questionnaire and interviews (group and individual). Four group interviews were used to explore the interpretation of aspiration as a concept and guide the design of the questionnaires. This was followed by the administration of the questionnaire that 239 students completed and a subsequent interviewing of only Year 12 students. The second research study involved 580 young people aged 17 to 19 from four secondary schools in Sheffield, UK with data collected using questionnaires and interviews. These studies found that young people's aspirations can be multidimensional and dynamic. The multidimensional nature of aspirations is seen in the different kinds of aspirations that young people have, which extends beyond educational and career aspirations. Sometimes, this wide variety of aspirations are held simultaneously as valuable, which makes it problematic to generally rank a kind of aspiration as high or low (Hart, 2012). On the other hand, the dynamic nature of young people's aspirations is seen in how they change over time. The three main reasons identified for the aspiration change in the studies were family aspirations and/or restrictions, young people's perception of abilities/aptitudes and/or examination results, as well as work experience/exposure.

Another important finding by Hart (2012) was that the agency to achieve an aspiration is related to the degree of ownership that the individual has in the formation of that aspiration. While young people can choose their aspirations, many are steered into particular aspirations by the significant others in their lives such as teachers and parents. Hart (2012) identifies four different kinds of aspirations based on the degree of ownership and draws a connection to the level of agency they engender in achieving the aspiration using the model in figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Hart (2012) multi-dimensional model of aspirations



Conflicting aspirations, as the name suggests, conflicts with the aspirations that the individual wants for themselves. Here, the individual exhibits the lowest level of agency or no agency at all. This is followed by the guided aspirations which is a product of the guidance from the significant others in the life of the individual. A low level of agency is displayed here. Shared aspirations are similar to guided aspirations because they have inputs from significant others. However, a higher level of agency is displayed with shared aspirations because the individual negotiates how they would achieve them using their own volition. With independent aspirations, individuals exercise their agency in developing their aspirations by themselves. This finding is similar to DeJaeghere's (2018) empirical research, which also showed that aspiration and agency were interrelated and socially situated, by drawing on Sen's capability approach, Appadurai's capacity to aspire and Bourdieu's 'habitus'. DeJaeghere (2018) conducted a 4-year longitudinal study that explored how the educational aspirations and agency of rural Tanzanian girls in a technical and vocational school, were nurtured and achieved amid gendered constraints. Not only do these girls respond to the constraints that they face using their agency and educational capabilities, but they also depend on their social relations to foster the realisation of their aspirations. This suggests that the factors which shape, and mediate aspirations do so in ways that can be constraining or supportive or a tension between both.

The theme that emerges across these studies is that aspirations are formed and constantly influenced by one's social relations, cultural history, spatial location and individual agency. Archer & Dewitt, 2017 summarises this theme thus:

> *"We understand aspirations as not simply personal attitudes or views, but as socially constructed phenomena that are shaped by young people's social and cultural histories and locations. That is, the future options that a young person might see as being possible (or impossible) and desirable (or undesirable) 'for me' will be influenced by their experiences, their background, how they have been brought up and their sense of who they are – all of which will vary by axes such as gender, social class and ethnicity" (Archer & DeWitt, 2017, p. 7)*

This study will be drawing lessons from Appadurai's Capacity to Aspire to understand how High-stakes examinations can influence young people's aspirations to go on to higher education because it addresses comprehensively the future orientation of aspiration through the understanding of the capacity to aspire as a navigational capacity. Furthermore, there is an ambiguity around how to operationalize a 'Capability to Aspire' because of the difficulty in quantifying and qualifying young people's freedom to choose. The concept 'Capacity to aspire' offered far less ambiguity. Appadurai was clear about how the capacity to aspire is a capacity to imagine a future drawing from one's cultural capital (i.e. cultural capacity), and a capacity to plan a pathway to that future (i.e. navigational capacity). While Bourdieu's theories would have also offered useful theoretical insights on the way that capital affects the aspiration for higher education, it is not the focus of this study. Another reason why Appadurai's capacity to aspire was considered a better theoretical framework for this study is that it implicitly asserts that the capacity to aspire is also a capacity to reimagine a different pathway or different future. By this, the role of agency is acknowledged and emphasised. This study aims to explore the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for Nigeria's secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education. The concept of capacity to aspire provides a useful way of understanding how these young people form and negotiate their imagined aspirations within a High-stakes testing environment, and which takes account of their agency in the process.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter examined High-stakes testing and the consequences that have been associated with it. Different contexts define the purpose and type of High-stakes testing that they adopt. Some High-stakes tests are used for certification/qualification, which informs selection into higher education or employment. The exit CE which this study is interested in is one of such High-stakes examinations. Selection using High-stakes testing is underpinned by meritocratic ideas of fairness and equal chances to all based on individual merit. This has been identified as flawed because of the impact that structural inequalities have on outcomes of High-stakes testing. Literature has shown that High-stakes testing reproduces and sometimes produce structural inequalities, in addition to how it also engenders both intended and unintended consequences for schools, teachers, students and the wider system. The focus of this study is the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing on young people aspiring to go to higher education in the Nigerian context. Drawing on different theorists like P. Bourdieu, A. Appadurai and S. Amarthya, several scholars have identified different factors that shape the aspirations of young people. This study will draw on A. Appadurai's conception of the capacity to aspire to shed light on how High-stakes testing affects young people who have aspirations for higher education. The choice of Appadurai was informed by the adequacy of its conceptualisation of the role of agency in young people's aspirations amongst others. An overarching theme in this review is the role of contextual considerations in how High-stakes testing differentially impact on people and systems. This study is situated within the Nigerian context; hence, Nigeria's examination and education system are examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

NIGERIA'S EDUCATION AND EXAMINATION SYSTEM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

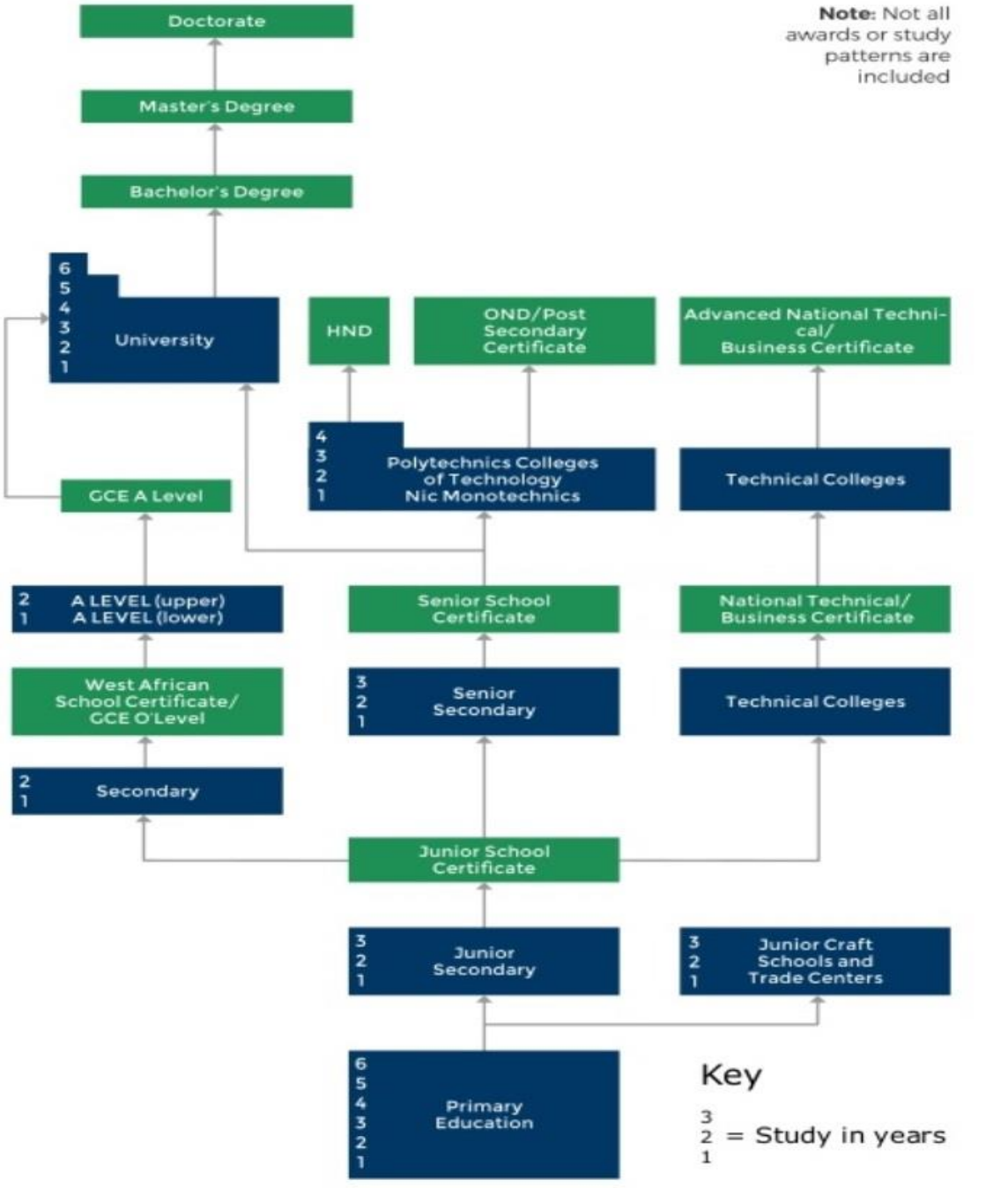
High-stakes examinations have been historically and intricately interwoven into the fabric of Nigeria's formal education system (Ekoh, 2012). This chapter is a synopsis of Nigeria's education and examination system, as well as a review of relevant research to buttress the discussions. This chapter is important because it sheds light on the key roles that High-stakes examinations play within Nigeria's education system and highlight the peculiar challenges surrounding them. Most importantly, this chapter shows how students' lived experiences of education generally, and High-stakes examinations specifically have been ignored in Nigeria's research and literature.

3.2 AN OVERVIEW

Formal education in Nigeria comprises 1 year of pre-primary education, 9 years of basic education, 3 years of senior secondary education and varied years of higher education that depends on the course and institution type (FGN, 2013). After undergraduate study, graduates have to mandatorily embark on a one-year national service under the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), which assigns them to different parts of the country to serve, as long as they are below 30 years of age. This National service introduces many graduates into the corporate world of work. The provision of education at all levels includes active participation from the public sector comprising the three tiers of Government (Federal, State and Local) and the private sector (individuals, communities, groups as well as for-profit, not-for-profit and religious organizations etc.). The public schools are owned and/or financed by the government; hence, they are usually free (at the basic education level) or subsidised (at the senior secondary and post-secondary level of education). The private schools are funded and operated by the private sector; hence, they usually charge fees. The private schools do not receive funding from any arm of government; hence, they have a level of autonomy in how they provide educational services. However, they are subject to some level of monitoring

and accountability from the Government as well as some of the government's educational policies and standards. Figure 5 below provides an overview of Nigeria's system of education.

Figure 5: Nigeria's Education System



Source: World Education Service (online slide on 'The Nigerian Education System and Student Mobility Trends')

3.3 BASIC EDUCATION AND EXAMINATION IN NIGERIA

For public schools, there is a Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme instituted by the federal government to ensure free and compulsory, 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education, for every Nigerian child who is school-aged (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2018). The implementation of the UBE programme falls under the jurisdiction of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and their affiliates at the state government level referred to as the State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs). The States and Local arms of government are financially responsible for the UBE provisions, although the Federal government intervenes with some level of funding. For private schools, school fees are paid, and this range from very cheap to very expensive depending on the type and quality of the private school.

Private schools thrive in Nigeria because they are viewed as better than the public schools in terms of quality of educational provisions and academic performance. There continues to be a strong preference for private schools amongst parents/guardians who can afford them because of these perceptions. By the 2015/2016 academic session, there were 62,184 public primary schools, 12, 520 public junior secondary schools, 34,717 private primary schools and 20,313 private junior secondary schools in Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017b). On the other hand, public schools are perceived as underfunded, under-resourced, low quality and unimpressive in terms of its pupils' academic performance. While this does not hold true for some public schools, it does hold true for many public schools. Images abound on public media of neglected and impoverished public schools. However, not all private schools provide an impressive education quality. In the Lagos State Private School Census, Harma (2011) found that only 63% of the teachers in private schools were qualified and 74% of the schools were not even approved by the Lagos state government.

The gross enrolment ratio for primary school was 83.81% and 43.09% for junior secondary school nationwide across both public and private schools for the 2015/2016 academic session (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017b). The main factors that influenced primary school attendance include the child's area of residence, household wealth status and mother's

education level, while gender was not found to be a significant influence (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2017). UNICEF (2017) reports that children from wealthier households, whose mothers are formally educated, reside in urban areas and are from the geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria are more likely to attend primary school than their counterparts. Nigeria has experienced an improvement in school attendance, gender parity and equality of educational opportunities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). Yet, Nigeria is adjudged to have 9 million children out of school, making it the country with the highest number of out of school children of primary school age (World Bank, 2019a). Public perceptions about the standard and quality of education in Nigeria is also negative (Irigoyen, 2017). This public perception is based on poor performance in general examinations, alongside other indicators like poor educational resources and facilities and low teacher qualifications (Moja, 2000).

As part of the measures to assess the quality of basic education in Nigeria, National Assessments, using achievement tests and questionnaires were conducted in 2001, 2003, 2006 and 2011 (these are the most recent, publicly available data). Three key findings that emerged from these assessments include a low academic performance of the pupils in core subjects, significant effect of family background, teachers and parents characteristics on academic performance, and the tendency for pupils to do better on recall items than on items that demand comprehension and application (Nwokeocha, 2017). However, there are inconsistencies in how the assessments have been done and reported, which makes the tracking of patterns and progress difficult (see Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC], 2013). For instance, in 2001 and 2003, the assessments were administered to pupils in primary 4 and 6; while in 2006, the assessment was administered to those in primary 4 and junior secondary classes 1-3. Then in 2011, the assessment was administered to those in primary classes 4 - 6 and junior secondary class 1. Another issue is how science and social studies were part of the assessment for 2001, 2003 and 2006, in addition to English and Language. However, both were excluded in the 2011 assessment, while life-skills assessment was included from 2003.

Although these assessments are meant to be low-stakes for the pupils who take them, they have some level of stakes for Nigeria's policymakers and politicians. This is linked to how global reforms continue to influence national reforms, especially in the education sector. For example, in the Education for All (EFA) 2015 National Review Report for Nigeria, the Honourable Minister of Education at the time noted that:

> *In the year 2000 when* Member States took stock of their performance in providing education, they were reminded by UNESCO that the Education for All (EFA) agenda had to be re-ignited with a new date set for its attainment. The Government of Nigeria have since then gone all out to meet the renewed target of 2015. As a result, policies have been adjusted and in some cases totally reformed, and programmes have been embedded in the already filled creatively and locally-relevant activities that the education sector had embarked upon (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2015, Foreword)

It is therefore not surprising that the four national assessments that have been conducted so far happened between 2000 and 2015. This tendency for global agenda and initiatives to influence educational reforms within the country also has implications on how the global testing culture is shaping High-stakes testing in Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian Government added 35 new vocational subjects to the senior secondary school curriculum with effect from the 2011/2012 academic session, in response to the EFA goal 3 which sought to ensure "*that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes*" (FME, 2015). The consequence of this is how students must now include at least one of these vocational subjects in their senior school exit Certificate Examinations (Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2013).

To get promoted from one classroom level to another in the primary and junior secondary classes, schools assess their pupils using formative and summative assessments (Nwokeocha, 2017). While the frequency and type of assessment may vary across school types, the use of tests and examinations remain consistent as the main assessment tools in Nigeria's primary and junior secondary schools. For instance, pupils who wish to attend the secondary schools that are owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria (referred to as Federal Unity Colleges), must take the National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE) in their final year of primary school. The NCEE which is administered by the National Examination Council (NECO), is thus

High-stakes for these pupils as it is used to determine the candidates that would be given admission, after due consideration to merit and state quota system requirements (NECO, 2019). The state-quota system is one of Nigeria's educational policy, which aims to give candidates from educationally disadvantaged states (which are mostly in the North) equal opportunity for admission into the Federal Unity Colleges to bridge the educational gap between the geopolitical south and north (Joshua, Loromeke & Olanrewaju, 2014). Joshua et al. (2014) however argue that the implementation of the policy is problematic because it discriminates against some high-achieving students based on their ethnicity. The wide gap in educational attainment/achievement between Nigeria's geopolitical North and South are well documented in the literature (see UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2017; UBEC, 2013). There are private schools as well that conduct entrance examination into their junior secondary school, but usually when they intend to reward high achievers in some way (e.g. scholarships), or they have a great reputation that makes entrance competitive (since private schools normally strive for an increase in their student numbers).

On completing junior secondary school, students who want to transit into public senior secondary schools would sit for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), but students in private schools are not obligated to write the BECE, as they may have their transition modalities. NECO also conducts the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for Federal Unity Colleges, while each State conducts the BECE for candidates in State-owned schools. Success in the BECE is measured by the attainment of Credit grades or above in six subjects that must include English Language and Mathematics. The BECE grading system is A = Distinction, B = Upper Credit, C = Lower Credit, P = Pass and F = Fail. The BECE result influences the academic track that students would follow at the senior secondary school. Thus, a student with poor grades in the STEM subjects will not be able to join the Science / Technical class. One of the criticisms of the BECE has to do with its relevance and cost of implementation, considering that many schools (both public and private) operate both the junior and senior secondary school as one holistic secondary education system (Okechukwu Ofili, 2014). Therefore, a school's internal assessment procedure might as well suffice rather than the huge investment on a nationally standardised examination. In their defence however, the presence of a national BECE means that uniform standard can be employed for

transitions into senior secondary school across the country. Research such as Enemarie et al. (2018) and Ogundokun & Oyedokun (n.d) have shown that academic performance at the BECE positively correlates with academic performance at the senior school exit Certificate examination (exit CEs). This predictive ability of the BECE means that although it is a summative assessment, it has the potential of being used formatively to help students improve. However, this possibility is not utilized so much within Nigeria's education system. Rather, the BECE is summarily used to provide students and the school with information about their strengths and weaknesses, which then informs the decision about the academic track to follow in senior school. Table 1 below summarises the High-stakes examinations that Nigerian students are expected to write for transitions between junior secondary school and higher education.

Table 1: Summary of High-stakes Exams Prior to Nigeria's Higher Education

EXAM BODY	**EXAM NAME**	**TIMING**	**PURPOSE**
NECO (National Examinations Council)	**BECE**	End of Junior secondary school	Certification and selection into senior secondary school
WAEC (West African Examinations Council)	**WASSCE**	End of Senior secondary school	Certification and selection into Higher Education
NECO (National Examinations Council)	**SSCE**	End of Senior secondary school	Certification and selection into Higher Education
NABTEB (National Business and Technical Education Board)	**NTCE/NBCE**	End of Technical / Vocational school	Certification and selection into Higher Education
JAMB (Joint Admission Matriculation Board)	**UTME**	Before entry into HE	Selection into Higher education
UNIVERSITIES	**Post-UTME**	Before entry into HE	Selection into Higher education

3.4 SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION AND EXAMINATIONS

Nigeria has two main types of senior secondary schools, both spanning three academic sessions/ class years and each year consisting of three school terms. The first type is the

mainstream academic track with different disciplinary options – Science, Technical, Arts/Humanities and Business/Social science options. Students choose or are constrained to follow the academic track that aligns with either their interest, aspirations, aptitude or academic performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination. The academic track chosen would determine the kind of subjects that students will attend classes in and write examinations for in their final year. On completing mainstream senior secondary school, students are expected to write the senior school exit Certificate Examinations (exit CEs). The exit CEs for the mainstream academic senior secondary schools are the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Both examinations are considered equivalent, although administered by different examination councils, and students can choose to write either of them or both. The WASSCE is administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC), which conducts examinations in five anglophone West African countries – Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The SSCE, on the other hand, is conducted by the National Examinations Council (NECO), a national and indigenous agency for only Nigerian examinations. Many students choose to write both to increase their chances of obtaining good grades in the year that they complete secondary school. Thus, the students who write the WASSCE and SSCE are not mutually exclusive. When NECO commenced the conduct of the SSCE in 2000, many stakeholders including students and higher education institutions doubted the quality, credibility and validity of their results (Okoye & Nwafor, 2009). This is beginning to change favourably as NECO is now considered valid evidence of secondary school achievement by higher institutions both within and outside Nigeria.

The second type of senior secondary schools is the (vocational) Technical Colleges which specifically offer technical/vocational education and training, in the form of specialised craft and trade modules. At the end of their studies, students in technical colleges are examined by the National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB) and awarded either the National Technical Certificate (NTC) or the National Business Certificate (NBC) when successful. The NTC/NBC is considered equivalent to the WASSCE /SSCE and is an approved qualification for entry into Nigeria's higher education (FGN, 2013). Despite the infusion of more vocational subjects into the mainstream curriculum, the conversion of vocational

schools to Science Technical Colleges in 2004 and other initiatives to increase technical and vocational education, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2017) attests that there was no meaningful gain yet with driving the economy and creating employment. By the 2015/2016 academic session, the national gross enrolment ratio for Nigeria's senior secondary schools was 34.95% (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017).

For both the WASSCE and SSCE, students are expected to register for a minimum of eight subjects and a maximum of nine subjects (FGN, 2013). The grading system for the secondary school exit Certificate examinations are A1 (Excellent), B2 (Very Good), B3 (Good), C4, C5, C6 (Credit), D7, E8 (Pass) and F9 (Fail). Nigeria's Policy on Education stipulates that these grades should be "based on continuous assessment and a national examination" (FGN, 2013, p. 15). Thus, Continuous Assessment Scores (CASS) of students' academic performance for the three years of senior secondary schooling which is based on teacher assessment in schools, is combined with the standardized and externally administered exit CE's Terminal Assessment Scores (TASS), in a statistically moderated ratio to obtain the grades, to give a more robust picture of the student's performance. The standard for success in the exit CEs is a minimum of Credit grades in at least five (5) subjects. For those aspiring to go onto higher education, these subjects must be relevant to the course that the student aspires to study at the higher education institution and should include English Language and Mathematics (Joint Admission Matriculation Board, 2017).

There has been a lot of credibility issues surrounding this policy of incorporating the school based Continuous Assessment Scores in the final grades. First, the Continuous Assessment Scores usually consists of the test and examination scores during the three years of senior secondary schooling, which rarely incorporates other non-cognitive assessments (Ajibade, 2014). Secondly, many research has shown that teachers can be generous when awarding marks to their students to boost the overall weighting of their students' grades (Nebe, 2011; Luyten & Dolkar, 2010). To address this both WAEC and NECO statistically moderate the Continuous Assessment Scores before it is combined with the examination's Terminal Assessment Scores. For instance, NECO statistically moderates the raw Continuous

Assessment Scores that are submitted by the schools to obtain what they call the Moderated Aggregate of the Continuous Assessment (MACA) at 30%, which is then combined with the Examination Scores, that is, Terminal Assessment Score at 70% to give a total of 100% weighting (Kolawole and Ala, 2013).

Despite these issues, some studies have found positive correlations of varying strengths between students' Continuous Assessment Scores and Terminal Assessment Scores across different subjects for both the WASSCE and NECO examinations (e.g. Nebe, 2011; Okpala, 2009; Hassan 1995; Awomolo, 1992). In cases where there were low or no correlations, teachers and/or schools' underhandedness such as the inflation and/or award of arbitrary Continuous Assessment Scores scores were suspected. Lamprianou, (2012) observes from literature and their research on Cyprus Certificate examinations that *"when the public is faced with a discrepancy between test results and teacher assessment, teacher assessment may be considered to be less reliable and more subjective*" (p. 41). This would suggest that all other factors remaining constant, students' academic performance at the school-leaving qualifications should fairly represent performance during three years of senior secondary schooling. However, it does not seem to adequately predict academic performance when they go onto university.

In their study, Obioma & Salau (2007) found that the Nigerian exit CEs poorly predicted academic achievement at the university level with the WASSCE showing the better predictability. Obioma & Salau (2007) had used regression analysis to investigate the predictive relationship between the exit CEs results (WASSCE, SSCE, NBTE/NBCE) and the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 4904 students in 22 Nigerian universities. From their findings, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), which is the entrance examination for HEIs had the least correlation with the CGPA. However, when combined with each of the exit CEs and correlated with the CGPA, it had a higher predictive value. The reason for this was not provided in the study, however their findings provide support for the current practice for admission into higher education, where students' academic performance in both the exit CEs and the UTME are considered to decide a student's eligibility for admission.

Studies like Afu and Ukofia (2017) have however found inconsistencies in the predictive validity of the exit CEs for higher education. They had carried out a correlation analysis between outcomes in the exit CEs of 720 university students and outcomes in their 100 Level examinations for the 2008/2009 – 2010/11 academic sessions. Based on the inconsistencies they found, they had uncritically concluded that the purpose of the exit CEs was not being achieved. By doing so, they had used findings of the predictive validity of the exit CEs to draw conclusions about the construct validity of the exit CEs. Correlational analysis in the way that they have done it, is grossly inadequate for drawing conclusions about the construct validity of a test. The construct validity of test items refers to the validity question about how well a test measures what it is meant to measure (AERA, APA & NCME, 2014). The exit CEs was not designed to measure the aptitude for higher education, and this also raises questions about its suitability for selection to Higher Education, especially when meritocracy is espoused as its underpinning strength.

The content validity of the exit CE items is another area of interest in Nigeria's literature e.g. the studies by Amajuoyi, Joseph and Udoh (2013) for Chemistry as well as Iweka (n.d) for Biology. Their findings agree that the content of the test items needs to be improved upon. In his review of developing countries' High-Stakes testing instruments for Primary and Secondary Schools, Burdett (2017) notes that while Nigeria exercises good practices in the assessment instruments for the senior school exit CEs, there are gaps in how they align with policy aspirations. Others have looked at the difficulty and discrimination indices of the items such as Olutola (2016) and some researchers have tried to compare the equivalence of the exit CEs administered by WAEC and NECO (see Bandele & Adewale, 2013; Kpolovie, Ololube & Ekwebelem, 2011; Ojerinde & Faleye, 2005; Kolawole, 2007; Udofia & Udoh, 2017). Using different criteria, these researchers did not find a significant difference between the SSCE administered by NECO and the WASSCE that is administered by WAEC, although studies like Anigbo (2018) found some level of difference. Some studies have also investigated the relationship between academic achievement in the exit CEs and variables like gender (Amuda, Ali & Durkwa, 2016), Learning environment (Duruji, Azuh & Oviasogie, 2014), instructional supervision (Usman, 2015) and school characteristics (Yusuf & Adigun, 2010). Considering the

wide range of methods, sample characteristics, subjects of interests and variables of interests, the findings have been varied and sometimes inconsistent.

Some studies have also investigated the impact of the exit CEs. For instance, Bosan (2018) investigated the effects of the West African Senior School Examinations (WASSCE) on the beliefs, pedagogy and assessment practices of Mathematics Teachers in Kaduna State, North-West Nigeria. The Qualitative study utilized observations and interviews to collect data from ten mathematics teachers. Official documents were also analysed as part of data. He found that mathematics teachers teach-to-the-exam by using teacher-centred lecture methods and past examination question papers to deliver class lessons as well as giving students classwork and home assignments. The past examination questions now served as the syllabus because it defined what should be taught and how it should be taught. This examination-driven pedagogy was also accompanied by the use of mathematics textbooks that emphasized the solving of examination-related questions. Again, some of the teachers did not write or follow a lesson plan and were frantic with the pace of their lessons because they needed to cover the content of past examination questions and examination-type questions in textbooks. And like this thesis already highlighted, Bosan (2018) noted that there was a dearth of studies that have researched the effect of High-stakes examinations. Bosan (2018) provides detailed insight into what teaching-to-the-test looks like in a Mathematics class within Nigeria and raises pertinent questions about how the exit CEs affected the learning experiences of the students. The current study, therefore, addresses this gap by focusing on the effects of the exit CEs on secondary school leavers who were aspiring to go onto higher education by focusing on their lived experiences and perceptions. This study also expanded the scope of the exit CE to include the SSCE that is administered by NECO.

In another study, Adegoke (2017) examined the perceived effects of the WASSCE on the teaching and learning of Physics in Oyo State, South-West Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered to 862 students in their final year of secondary school and thirty of their physics teachers. Their responses were analysed using descriptive statistics. In the questionnaire for the Physics teachers, they were asked if the WASSCE affected the way they taught Physics,

the ways that it did and the teaching methods they adopted to finish the syllabus. More than 80% of the teachers confirmed that they felt pressured to "cover all the topics in the syllabus", "concentrate on areas/questions that usually come out in SSCE" and "practice past/old questions" (Adegoke, 2017, p. 234). The frequently used teaching method was lectures and practical experiments. In a similar questionnaire that was adapted to focus on learning rather than the teaching of physics, students were asked if and how the WASSCE affected their learning of physics. All the respondents agreed that the WASSCE affected the way they learnt Physics. The most frequent effect based on their views was that it encouraged them to practise past exam questions with their peers and to attend classes regularly. Since closed-ended questionnaires were used, respondents could not add personal experiences to the specific options that they had to choose from. Due to this limitation, this study used open-ended vignettes in the questionnaires, which gave room for respondents to express the possibilities beyond the options that they were given. This study also focused on the use of qualitative methods to collect data in order to avoid some of the limitations associated with describing a phenomenon based on perceptions only. Nonetheless, Adegoke's (2017) research offers useful insight into teachers and students' awareness of the ways that the exit CEs can shape their teaching and learning. This supports an underlying assumption in this study that young people who have experienced the Nigerian exit CE have an awareness of how it influences their aspirations for higher education. Hence, the phenomenological approach which underpins this study's research design, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5 HIGHER EDUCATION AND ENTRY EXAMINATIONS

Nigeria's higher education comprises the Universities, Polytechnics, Specialised institutions and post-secondary colleges like the Colleges of Agriculture, Colleges of Health and the Colleges of Education. Higher education is provided by the Federal and State Governments (public institutions) as well as private individuals and organizations (private institutions). The Government has continued to take steps like increasing the number of HE institutions, the establishment of an Open University, and the introduction of the Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) and Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs), to expand the opportunities for higher education in the country. The IEIs and VEIs promote the employability of secondary school leavers through the acquisition of specialised skills and broaden the opportunities for

higher education by increasing access, since existing HE institutions cannot accommodate the teeming applicants (FME, 2015). As of December 2019, there were 174 universities and 134 Polytechnics, as well as the other types of higher education institutions across the country (National Board for Technical Education [NBTE], 2019; National Universities Commission [NUC], 2019).

Student enrolment in all these institutions increase yearly, and still leaves a deficit of students who are ready for higher education but are unable to secure a place at these institutions. For instance, 4,046,437 students were enrolled in secondary schools with a completion rate of 90%, but only 632,146 were enrolled in all the higher education institutions (and across all the levels) in 2010. In 2017, JAMB facilitated the successful admission of only 566,641 (32.9%) candidates, out of 1,722,236 applications (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2018). These candidates do not include over 16,000 students that were admitted into the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), as well as those admitted into the Part-time, Sandwich and Distance learning programmes of these institutions. In 2011, the gross enrolment for tertiary education was 10.17% (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018). By the 2012/2013 academic session, there were 1,274,261 students enrolled across all the Universities, and 698,874 students enrolled in other types of higher education institutions for the 2014/2015 academic session (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018a). While Nigeria's higher education experience massive numerical growth in terms of student enrolment, it continues to grapple with issues surrounding access, underfunding, political instability, corruption, infrastructural deficits and nepotism among others (Agboola & Ofegbu, 2010; Eribo, 1996; Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2003). Yet, access to higher education for many remains a mirage even as the number of applicants continues to outweigh the number of available spaces in the higher education institutions (Adeyemi, 2001; Agboola & Ofoegbu, 2010; Akinyemi & Ofem, 2012 Saint et al. 2003).

Figure 6: Nigeria's UNIVERSITY Degrees and Requirements

Degree	Admission Requirement	Program Length/Requirements
Bachelor of Arts/Science	• 5 Credit passes in SSCE • UTME (includes English + 3 subjects in related field) • Additional departmental requirements	• 4 Years FT Study • Compulsory or core courses, may require thesis, research project
Degrees in professional fields e.g. Medicine	• 5 Credit passes in SSCE • UTME (includes English + 3 subjects in related field) • Additional departmental requirements	• 5-6 years FT Study • Compulsory or core courses, may require thesis, research project or internship
Postgraduate Diploma	• Bachelor's degree • HND with upper credit	• 1 year FT • May require internship, project or seminar depending on specializations
Master of Arts/Science	• Bachelor's degree • Professional/Postgraduate • Diploma with credit passes	• 1-2 years FT • Thesis required
Master of Philosophy	• Master's degree • Bachelor's degree with upper second class	• 1 year FT • Research or research and coursework
Doctor of Philosophy	• Master's degree with thesis • Master of Philosophy	• 3 years FT • Research or research and coursework

Source: World Education Service (online slide on 'The Nigerian Education System and Student Mobility Trends')

For many, their access to education will determine the opportunities that they will get to attain economic prosperity and social mobility (Saint et al. 2003; Dillard, 2003). In his study which evaluated the economic returns of higher education for Nigerians, Okuwa (2004) found that average earnings increased with more years of schooling, which supports the view of many that higher education is a "*fairly good private investment*" (p.26). This meant that the higher the level of education that one acquired, the more the economic returns that one gets, such that graduates from the University will earn more than those from the polytechnics and colleges of education, secondary school and primary school in that order (Okuwa, 2004). This explains the quest for university education over other forms of higher education in Nigeria. JAMB (2018) notes that some students were unwilling to take up offers in other higher education institutions that were not Universities. Okuwa (2004) also reported findings that explain the historical discrimination against holders of the Higher National Diploma (HND), which is meant to be equivalent to the Bachelors' degree, a situation that the members of

Nigeria's house of representatives had to intervene in (Aborishade, 2019; Gbonegun, 2018). HNDs are awarded after 4 years of study at a Polytechnic while the bachelor's degree is awarded after 4 years of study at the University. Unfortunately, the Polytechnic is regarded as a subsidiary or second class to Universities, a situation that continues to undermine the equating of the HND to the Bachelors' degree in the labour market.

Every secondary school leaver aspiring to go onto any level of Nigeria's higher education is required to successfully negotiate the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) – the entrance exam into Nigeria's HEIs, in addition to the exit CE previously mentioned. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) conducts the UTME for students who have reached 16 years and completed a secondary level of education. Some higher education institutions further conduct screening on shortlisted candidates from the UTME via an examination that is popularly referred to as Post-UTME. UTME candidates are expected to write four subjects - the Use of English and three other subjects that are relevant to their proposed course of study, with the maximum score for each subject being 100. There are no grade allocations for UTME; rather, a candidate's UTME performance is his/her cumulative score across the four subjects written.

Every year, JAMB specifies the acceptable standard of success, which is commonly referred to as the 'Cut Off Marks' (COM), below which a student will not be considered eligible for admission into the respective institutions. For instance, for the 2017/2018 academic session, JAMB in collaboration with all the Nigerian Higher education institutions and education regulators determined that the general COM was to be 120 for Universities and 100 for the other higher education institutions, (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2017b). Then, each institution is expected to determine its specific COM and other admission parameters/criteria for each of their course programmes. These other parameters/criteria often include specifics about expected performance in the exit CEs and a Post-UTME screening process (Ibid.). Putting each institutions' specified COM and admission parameters into consideration, JAMB proposes successful candidates for each institution. It is amongst these successful candidates that each institution reviews and approves those that they

recommend for admission into their institution. The recommended candidates are then offered 'Provisional Admission' by JAMB, which is confirmed after the candidates accept the admission. While enrolment is likely to increase yearly, there is always a deficit of students who are ready for higher education and obtained the cut-off mark but are unable to secure a place at these institutions, because they either did not meet other requirements or cannot meet the financial obligations for HE. For instance, only 55.26% of the quota allocated to the higher education institutions by the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board in 2017 was taken up (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2018). The deficit was mainly as a result of students not attaining the general COM, or the specific COM for the institution and programme they chose, not obtaining the required grades in the Exit CEs, unsuitable UTME subject combinations that do not align with course preferences and other criteria associated with the Course preferences as well as the unwillingness of some students to settle for alternatives (Ibid.). These potential explanations will be further explored in the current study.

During the selection process for public HE institutions, considerations are given to candidates who originate from educationally less developed States as well as those from States that are in the geographical area contiguous to the institution, as part of the government initiatives to promote educational access and equity. This has been previously described as the quota system, which also plays out for admission into Federal Unity Colleges. JAMB reserves a percentage of the admissions for those who are indigenes of States close to the institution (catchment area), another percentage for the educationally disadvantaged regions of the country and some percentage of the admissions to the Vice-Chancellor, while the rest are admitted based on merit (Saint et al. 2003). This quota system is problematic and has engendered corrupt practices at different levels (Agboola & Ofoegbu, 2010). In his study, Adeyemi (2001) investigated the rationale and implication of admitting students into 22 federal universities using the catchment area policy and spanning the four academic sessions between 1990/1991 and 1993/94. He had collected data about:

> *enrolment of the terminal grade at the secondary school level in the country for the period of study; − student admission by state of origin; − admission through catchment area factor; − admission through merit, University discretion and educationally disadvantaged; − student examination scores; and − dropout/withdrawal rates and repetition rates among the fresh students*

The data were quantitatively analysed using the T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to make comparisons and highlight the trends in the data. He found that admission reflected equality in the representations of candidates from all the States in Nigeria, as the policy intended. However, in terms of academic performance, he found a significant difference between students admitted by merit and those admitted by catchment area, while there was no significant difference between students admitted by merit and students admitted based on other factors. Adeyemi (2001) therefore recommends that the percentages allotted to catchment areas be reduced and more students be admitted based on merit. Thus, while trying to address the challenge of educational disadvantages, it was important that other students were not being put at a disadvantage when they merit admission into higher education. This study by Adeyemi (2001) highlights the complexities surrounding the realization of the aspiration to go to higher education in the Nigerian context. Even when students successfully negotiate the High-stakes examinations within the Nigerian context, they might still have to navigate some of these issues that have been highlighted, and these issues are further explored in the current study.

3.6 CHALLENGES OF NIGERIA'S EDUCATION AND EXAMINATIONS SYSTEM

Nigeria's education system is plagued by several challenges such as poor planning, weak policy implementations, under-funding, inadequate supervision and monitoring; inequitable opportunities, infrastructural deficits, teacher-centred pedagogies and classroom practices (Johnson, 2008; Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007; Oyewole, 2017; Saint et al. 2003). Nigeria's large population, weak democracy, corruption issues as well as divisions and strife along religious and ethnic lines engender these challenges (UNESCO, 2015). As a result, problems of unacceptable education quality and large inequalities are pervasive (Greanery & Kellaghan, 1996). In this section, education quality and inequalities in Nigeria will be discussed in relation to the ways that it shapes the examination system as well as the implications it has for students' lived experience of the High-stakes examinations and their aspirations for higher education.

3.6.1 Education Quality

Revisiting the discussion on education quality in chapter 2 (see section 2.2.3), education quality in Nigeria is typically described and understood as the quality of formal education received in schools/institutions (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016). The public perception of education quality in Nigeria, based on the quality of infrastructural facilities and instructional materials (Input), teaching staff, content and methods (processes) and student academic performance in High-stakes examination (outcome) is that it is low (Arong & Ogbadu, 2010; Asiyai, 2013; Duze, 2011; Moja, 2000; Ojedokun & Aladejana, 2012). In terms of input, quality in Nigeria's education system has been faulted by how it is underfunded. In the 2015 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, it was observed that "*Education is not a priority in many National budgets"* (p. 239), since they recommend 15 – 20% of government expenditure on education. This is the case in Nigeria. For the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017, the National budgetary allocation to education was 10.63%, 10.75%, 7.92% and 7.04% respectively (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017a). This is quite low compared to other sub-Saharan African countries. Considering Nigeria's population and the existing needs within the education system, this level of investment in education is grossly inadequate. The key sources of funding for education in Nigeria are Government allocations, individual school fees, external grants/aids and income-generating ventures of the respective schools/institutions (Oralu & Oladele, 2015). However, the Government only allocates fund to public schools/institutions and may provide scholarships or bursaries to individuals who meet specified criteria. There are no loan provisions for Nigerian students at any education level. As earlier mentioned, only the 9 years of basic education is free for public school students. From senior secondary school onwards, students in public schools are expected to pay subsidised tuition fees due to the allocations from the Government.

The impact of underfunding is more pronounced in higher education because of its capital-intensive nature, although it receives a greater share from the budgetary allocation (Saint et al., 2003). Nigeria's higher education is plagued by a shortage of qualified teaching staff, lack of instructional /material resources, frequent staff union disputes that lead to the temporary closure of the institutions, limited staff development opportunities, drop-outs, cultism as well

as leadership/policy deficiencies (Asiyai, 2013; Saint et al., 2003). These issues are engendered and exacerbated by the underfunding problem of the education sector. Underfunding of education is also indicted when education quality is framed in terms of the teaching and learning processes. Private primary and secondary schools are perceived as having better quality than their public-school counterparts, because of the amount of teaching and the wider range of learning experiences that they provide (Oyewole, 2017). This better quality is linked to the amount of funds invested in these schools by their stakeholders but mostly from the fees paid by students. As a result, they are relatively expensive as those who can afford to pay for education in private schools bear most of the financial burden. This often excludes many from low- income homes or those with peculiar family circumstances e.g. domestic helps, orphans etc, thereby exacerbating the issues surrounding access and equality of opportunities. Not all private schools provide good quality of education, especially the low-cost private schools that operate in poor conditions and employ poorly qualified staff (Härmä, 2011). Nonetheless, private schools remain an explicit government policy and a popular option amongst those who can afford it.

In terms of processes, quality in Nigeria has been faulted by the presence of teacher shortages, unqualified teachers and teaching ineffectiveness in schools. Shortage of qualified Teachers undermines education quality because teachers play very important roles in achieving the educational goals of any country. UNESCO (2015b) notes that Nigeria requires additional 400,000 primary school teachers from 2012 to 2030. In his study, Adeyemi (2011) found an acute shortage of STEM subject teachers in rural and urban schools of Ondo State, South-West Nigeria. He had collected data from the principal of all the 281 senior secondary schools in the State as at the year 2011, using an inventory and questionnaire to assess teacher shortages and surpluses in the State. In another study by Subair & Talabi (2015), which investigated teacher shortage in public secondary schools of Osun State, South-West Nigeria; teacher shortage was mostly attributed to poor remuneration and working conditions of teacher and high student enrolment, while 'poor quality of instruction', high stress level and students' low academic performance were mostly indicted as the consequences of teacher shortage. In an editorial where teacher shortage in Nigeria's primary and secondary schools was acknowledged, the Registrar for the Teachers Registration

Council of Nigeria (TRCN) had attributed teacher shortage to teachers leaving the profession, non-replacement of retired teachers and the insecurity crisis in North-East Nigeria (Erunke, 2018). In 2012, Nigeria was listed amongst the five countries with a Pupil/Teacher Ratio of above 30:1 out of 92 countries, at their upper secondary level of education (UNESCO, 2015b). Teacher shortage, therefore, appears to be an issue worth addressing if education quality must be improved in the Nigerian context. Teachers without the prerequisite qualifications for teaching is also another challenge in Nigeria's education system. UNESCO (2015b) mentioned that only two-thirds of Nigerian teachers have a minimum pre-requisite qualification. Research has found a positive relationship between teacher qualifications and students' academic achievement (Kola & Sunday, 2015; Abe, 2014)

In terms of outcome, the academic performance of students in High-stakes examinations, particularly the exit CEs, have been used to make a judgement about the education quality in the Nigerian context (Ojedokun & Aladejan, 2012). Unfortunately, poor examination outcomes is a recurrent issue in the exit CEs, thereby raising concern for all relevant stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, schools, higher institutions, examination bodies, employers of labour and the Government (Uduh, 2009; Ijaiya, 2000; Moja, 2000). For instance, more than one-third of the total candidates who sat for the WASSCE in 2016, 2017 and 2018 all over Nigeria did not meet the required benchmark of success for going into universities that is, at least 5 or more Credit grades in subjects that must include English Language and mathematics (although the students who meet the required benchmark continue to exceed the available spaces in HE). Table 2 below summarises students' academic performance in WASSCE for those three years. The release of the High-stakes examination results heralds different kinds of emotions depending on how well or poorly the outcomes were and the consequences arising from the outcomes. And so, there is the public outcry about how the standards or quality of education in Nigeria is falling when dismal results are released (Ojedokun & Aladejan, 2012).

Table 2: Academic Performance in WASSCE (2016 - 2018)

WASSCE Year	TOTAL SCHOOL CANDIDATES	% OF TOTAL WHO GOT 5 CREDITS & ABOVE INCLUDING MATHEMATICS & ENGLISH LANG.
2016	1,543,974	52.3
2017	1,558,452	56.53
2018	1,571,536	48.15

Source: FME (2019)

Then there is the issue of examination malpractice which continues to raise questions about the quality of education that students receive and the quality of the grade results that they are awarded in the exit CEs. In December 2019, WAEC withdrew the certificates of 10 people who wrote the exit CE between 1992 and 2014 for examination malpractices (Vanguard Newspaper, 2019). Examination malpractices have gotten so bad that in 2011, Nigeria was ranked first in the world's examination malpractice index (Eneh & Eneh, 2014). Examination malpractices in the exit CEs continue to grow in sophistication and modus operandi. Some believe that the examination malpractice problem in the educational system is a product of the corruption in Nigeria's wider political terrain, and tacit approval of the behaviour by the wider society (Nnam & Otu, 2015). Jimoh (2009) therefore argues that if corruption continues to persist in the wider Nigerian society, examination malpractice will go unabated in Nigeria's education system.

3.6.2 Educational Inequalities

Quality education should create situations where all have a fair and equal chance to participate in learning experiences and use them for their objectives (Adams 1993; UNESCO 2005). The Nigerian Government has taken commendable steps to expand access at all levels of education. The free education from primary to junior secondary school is one notable initiative. At the higher education level, the Government established a National Open University (NOUN) in 2002, increased the number of federal institutions, administer bursaries to students and approve the establishment of several private institutions. However, access is not a guarantee for quality (Adams, 1993). Increasing access to education without ensuring a

commensurate increase in available resources will undermine education quality (Obanya, 2004). This is one of the problematic consequences of the access agenda in Nigeria. Then, there is the disparity between Nigeria's rural and urban areas as well as the Northern and Southern geographical regions, which has implications for education quality and access. Living in a rural area can limit the access that one has to good schools and quality education. The 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report notes that in Nigeria, rural access to education deteriorated from 2003 to 2013, thereby increasing rural-urban inequality (UNESCO, 2015a). This report also declared that Nigeria was one of the countries with the worst within-country inequality in access, with those in Northern Nigeria more likely to be educationally and economically disadvantaged. Nonetheless, there continues to be a high demand for education despite these issues, considering the opportunity for social/economic mobility that it offers (Szymanski Sunal et al, 2003; Fafunwa 1991).

Then there is the issue of how gender plays into the dynamics of inequalities in Nigeria's education system. Gender inequalities in the wider society have a historical antecedent in the Nigerian context, which was also reproduced in education by how females were discriminated against in accessing formal education (Makama, 2013). Gender inequality in education is worse in Northern Nigeria when compared to Southern Nigeria. UNICEF (2019) report that only 41% and 47% of girls who are eligible to receive primary education in North-east and North-west Nigeria respectively get an education, a development that has been linked to social attitudes. Some of the social attitudes stem from the male supremacy and patriarchal system prevalent in many parts of Nigeria, which exerts and propagates the dominance, devaluing and discrimination of the females (Makama, 2013; Okoli, 2007). A lot has been done to bridge the disparity between males and females in relation to educational access, participation and opportunities. However, as table 3 below shows, there is still room for improvement since the population of males in all levels of schooling continue to exceed the population of the females in hundreds of thousands. Table 3 summarises enrolment, retention and completion rate in 2010 and across all levels of Nigeria's education system:

Table 3: 2010 Enrolment, Retention and Completion Rates

Level	Enrolment Rate						Retention	Completion Rate		
	Male (M)		Female (F)		Total (M&F)		M&F	M	F	M&F
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	%	%	%
Primary	10,998,709	41.84	9,303,000	35.39	20,301,709	77.23	89.0	69.0	72.0	70.5
Jnr. Secondary	2,703,938	23.26	2,306,289	19.84	5,010,236	43.10	86.0	72.0	73.0	72.5
Senior Secondary	2,201,215	21.60	1,845,222	18.11	4,046,437	39.71	88.0	89.0	91.0	90.0
Tertiary Institutions	391,431	1.20	240,715	0.74	632,146	1.94	94.8	91.2	91.8	91.5

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2017)

It is however interesting to note that the completion rate for the girls outweighs that of the boys, although the total population of boys was estimated at 51% to exceed that of the girls at 49% in 2018 (World Bank, 2019).

Using a phenomenological qualitative approach in his doctoral research, Okoli (2007) explored the barriers to accessing educational opportunities that were experienced by 24 Nigerian women. He had purposefully selected the women to include those who were very educated and those who were not, as well as women from Nigeria's three main ethnic groups. For the women who did not access formal schooling, the factors that engendered the situation was parental ignorance of the value of education, early marriage and the social attitudes that valued the males over the females (Okoli, 2007). The educated women all had at least a master's degree while five had doctorate degrees. These educated women also had to contend with the social attitudes of men feeling threatened by educated women and the influence of family background and significant others. This study by Okoli (2007) successfully heightened the voices of women who have been affected by gender inequalities in Nigeria's education system, using a phenomenological approach which emphasises the focus on lived experiences.

This is why phenomenology was considered a useful approach in the current study for examining how High-stakes testing affected young people aspiring to higher education. Young people's lived experiences of High-stakes testing can be dissonant from the expectations of High-stakes testing (Ekoh, 2012). High-stakes examinations supposedly offer all students an equal test of their abilities. However, if students lived experiences consist of disadvantages that deprive them access to quality education, then High-stakes examinations cannot be considered an accurate representation of student abilities since the inequalities in the larger society are reproduced in education generally and in assessment particularly (e.g. Au, 2009; Koretz, 2008). This also faults the ideology of meritocracy which underpins the selection of students into Nigeria's higher education despite the exemptions given through policies like catchment area for HE admissions. Therefore, High-stakes testing may contribute to an environment where students' lived experiences of gender inequalities, regional inequalities, rural/urban inequalities and ethnic inequalities are exacerbated.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, a glimpse into Nigeria's education and examination system has been offered, and this has revealed that High-stakes testing is endemic in Nigeria's education system. This is evidenced by the critical analysis of the important High-stakes examinations across all levels of Nigeria's education system. Furthermore, the key debates surrounding these High-stakes examinations have been reviewed. This has revealed two things. First, although the current challenges within Nigeria's education system are influenced by financial constraints and leadership failings, these challenges go on to shape Nigeria's education and examination system. Secondly, the research on High-stakes testing in the Nigeria context is yet to include critical questions on how High-stakes examinations affect the lived experience and aspirations of test-takers. It is this research gap that this study addresses. Nevertheless, despite the challenges that confront Nigeria's education and examination system, it continues to produce high-quality educated people who go onto achieve great feats locally and internationally (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] News, 2019; Fosco, 2018; Yeboah, 2013). In the next chapter, the methodology that informed this study, as well as the research methods that were utilised for data collection and analysis, are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide a detailed account of how this study was rigorously conducted. It will begin by presenting the philosophical framework of the study while rationalizing why it was chosen. This will be followed by a comprehensive discussion on the research design, sampling strategy, research instruments, data collection and data analysis procedures that were employed in this study. The chapter will end with a succinct overview of the quality and ethical considerations that were accounted for in the current study. The aim of this study is to explore the unintended consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate examination for young people aspiring to higher education, by examining secondary school leavers' lived experiences and perceptions of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate examination (exit CE). The following research questions were addressed to achieve this aim:

RQ1: What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs)?

a) What views do secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education hold concerning the exit CEs and their potential consequences?

b) What are the hypothetical options of secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, when confronted with hypothetical exit CEs outcomes?

RQ2: How does the lived experience of the exit CEs affect secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?

a) What is the lived experience of the exit CEs like for secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education in Nigeria?
b) What strategies do secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education use to negotiate the exit CEs?
c) What factors influence secondary school leavers aspiration for higher education?

RQ3: What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the philosophical framework that is providing methodological guidance to this study is explained, and its relevance and appropriateness to answering the outlined research questions above are provided. The use of a philosophical framework to underpin a research study means that the research will draw both theoretical and methodological guidance from it (Crotty, 1998). This study loosely positions itself within Phenomenology as a philosophical framework and draws methodological guidance specifically from how Martin Heidegger's Hermeneutic Phenomenology was conceptualised by J. Smith (2004; 2011). To draw methodological guidance from phenomenology, four key assumptions of phenomenology – *Lived experience, Consciousness, Essence (meanings) and Bracketing (epochè)* - must be understood.

Lived experience refers to the lived interaction between the consciousness of an experiencing individual and a phenomenon in the world that is experienced (Giorgi, 2009; Lewis & Staehler, 2010; Moran, 2000). Phenomenology seeks to insightfully understand and describe the meaning structures of that interaction, as it is directly, immediately and pre-reflectively lived, although it is reflectively grasped as past experience (van Manen, 1997). This implies that any phenomenon that manifests outside consciousness does not fall within the jurisdiction of lived experience because consciousness is intentional (van Manen 1997, 2014). According to Crotty (1998):

> *"Intentionality posits a quite intimate and very active relationship between the conscious subject and the object of the subject's consciousness. Consciousness is directed towards the object; the object is shaped by consciousness…not only is consciousness intentional, but human beings in their totality are intentionally related to their world." (p. 44)*

Therefore, lived experience is always the lived experience of 'something'; that is, the consciousness of something (Smith et al., 2009). This 'something' is the object of experience, the phenomenon that one is conscious of, before meaning is attributed to it (Crotty, 1998). The phenomenon of interest in this study is specifically Nigeria's exit CE (and broadly High-stakes testing). Research that is phenomenological will therefore focus on how people perceive and talk about a phenomenon based on their lived experiences of that phenomenon, rather than on how existing theoretical or conceptual systems describe that phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The task of phenomenology then is to get at the universal meanings that are attributed to the phenomenon as it gives itself to consciousness (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 2017). These meanings also referred to as the 'essence' of a phenomenon, distinguish the components of one experience from another experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

To understand what distinguishes one individual's experience from another individual's experience, one needs to move beyond the particularity of a lived experience to discover a universal essence situated in the lived meanings (Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 1997; 2014). This universal meaning or 'essence' is not the same thing as universal experience because each individual's lived experience and meaning making of that experience is unique. In phenomenology, the universal 'essence' encompasses the knowledge and insight that describes or explains the meaning across the collection of individual meanings. Accessing this essence requires the 'Bracketing' of existing preconceptions about a phenomenon in order to allow the phenomenon to speak for itself (Vagle, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011). Phenomenology assumes that it is possible to gain new or authenticated or enhanced meanings of a phenomenon when existing understandings and preconceptions about that phenomenon are bracketed, and the lived experience of that phenomenon is revisited (Crotty, 1998; Finlay, 2014; Giorgi, 2012; Moran, 2000; Spegielberg, 1975). Thus, phenomenology invites us to critique our preconceptions and presuppositions; that is, radically question the *a priori* status of things (Crotty, 1998; van Manen, 2017).

Many scholars agree that the pure form of bracketing, as espoused by the founding phenomenological philosophers like Edmund Husserl isn't realistically possible within

empirical research because of the value-laden nature of every research process and the values that are embedded in the researcher. Finlay (2014) therefore suggests compromises in pragmatic ways for implementing the philosophical idea of bracketing, based on the recommendations of hermeneutic scholars like Max van Manen and Gadamer as follows:

> *"Researchers accept that what participants say about their own experience is their "truth" and do not morally judge. Their focus is on the meaning of the situation as it is given in the participant's experience…. being empathic and genuinely curious while also being reflexively (i.e., being critically self- aware) mindful of our own position and perspective given our particular personal, cultural, and historical location" (Finlay, 2014, p. 123).*

This study, therefore, operationalised bracketing using the common reflexive techniques in qualitative research (Finlay, 2014; Smith et al. 2009). However, bracketing can only be partially achieved since the influence of the researcher's views/experiences on the interpretation process is inevitable (Finlay, 2013). Thus, this study focused on the bracketing of presuppositions from theoretical knowledge/explanations during data collection only, by focusing on lived experiences during the qualitative phase while the questionnaire design for the quantitative phase was informed by preliminary findings from the qualitative phase. This limited form of bracketing has been criticised by phenomenological scholars like Giorgi (2011), yet the value-laden nature of the research process cannot be overlooked.

Phenomenology is appropriate for achieving the aim of this study and addressing the research questions because it focuses on understanding the essence or meaning structures of a phenomenon through the lived experience of that phenomenon (Finlay, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; van Manen, 1997, 2014, 2017; Vagle, 2014). Since the researcher is expected to be open, curious and sensitive to the phenomenon (in whatever form it is expressed), the external meaning structures that come from theoretical explanations, in addition to the personal experiences of the researcher is to be temporarily bracketed for new or richer meanings to emerge. Consequently**,** phenomenological studies do not necessarily begin with theories that explain human behaviour and experience, since theories encourage the imposition of external meaning structures on these experiences rather than the derivation of meaning from lived experience (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen,

2014; 1997). This is because theories provide linguistic vocabularies and assumptions for framing the way meaning is abstracted and conceptualized from a lived experience. Phenomenology strongly advocates for meaning to be directly abstracted from lived experience (van Manen, 2017). This implies that in a very general manner, the philosophical assumptions immanent in phenomenology as a philosophy becomes the theoretical framework of the phenomenological research.

Nonetheless, specific theories can be used to interpret, critique, compare or contrast the understandings and meanings that are deduced from the lived experience (Smith et al. 2009; Vagle, 2014). Van Manen (2014) describes this relationship between phenomenology and theory thus:

> *It is the experience that is the ultimate bearer of meaning, not some theory, linguistic formulation, or abstractive construction……. somewhat shockingly perhaps, the phenomenologist distrusts theory. The project of phenomenology aims to question the assumptions and abstractions of theory, push off theoretical frames, shake off the captive constraints of concepts and penetrate and deflate the suppositions that are wittingly or unwittingly adopted by theory…. so rather than using theory as a scaffold for building an interpretive structure, phenomenology uses theory as a foil for examining what it glosses. (pp. 65 - 67)*

In other words, the lived experience in and of itself is considered sufficient data from which the meanings that individuals consciously associate with a phenomenon can be abstracted. Against this background, phenomenology was considered appropriate as a philosophical framework since it prioritises the emergence of meaning from personal human experience as lived, independent of the theories that attempt to explain the human experience. This study, therefore, relied on theory only when interpreting the findings from secondary school leavers perceptions, hypothetical preferences and lived experiences of the Nigerian exit CEs, in relation to its effect on their aspirations for higher education. In this study, the non-deference to theories to inform data collection and analysis is particularly important because it adequately accommodates and aligns with the objective of giving primacy to the voices of the students, on a topic that affects them but which has witnessed their minimal contribution in how it has been researched, particularly within the Nigerian context where their voices are rarely featured.

During the data interpretation phase, a theoretical model based on Appadurai's (2013) conception of the capacity to aspire was used to interpret the findings from the lived experience of the phenomenon, that is, Nigeria's exit CEs (High-stakes examinations). Since the aim of the research was the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing on young people who were aspiring to go onto higher education, a theory of aspiration was considered more appropriate to examine the interpretations on the impact of High-stakes testing. Again, Appadurai's capacity to aspire is a theory that is future-oriented, a characteristic that aligned with this study's aim to investigate consequences on future-oriented young people. Furthermore, phenomenology is framed within an epistemology that is accepting of multiple realities, each reality being subjectively unique and dependent on the context and the personal circumstances that frame the reality (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). This makes the framework sensitive to the peculiarities that may emerge from the experiences situated within the Nigerian context. This is what informed the choice of phenomenology as the philosophical framework for gaining insight into the consequences of experiencing Nigeria's High-stakes examinations, especially as it relates to secondary school leavers aspiration to go onto higher education.

The use of a theoretical model the way that it was used in this study is not uncommon for phenomenological research. In her PhD thesis, Horrigan-Kelly (2005) used hermeneutical phenomenology as a philosophical framework to examine the views and experiences of teenage parents as service users of universal child and family health care services. With research questions and findings that aligned to the phenomenological perspective, Horrigan-Kelly (2005) went on to use Derek Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains to interpret her findings. Her rationale was that:

> *Following the initial explication of the phenomenological findings it was evident that participants' existence was impacted by other people, processes and structures within their world. From these viewpoint critical realist principles using Derek Layder's (1997) Theory of Social Domains was used to explicate the causative mechanisms within social life that shaped the lived experience of being a teenage parent service user. (Abstract)*

Another doctoral thesis by Philips (2016) used Ecological Systems Theory and Adult Resilience Theory as the interpretive framework for the findings in his hermeneutical phenomenological study, which explored academic persistence in ten African American male undergraduates. For Okoli (2007), he used the phenomenological approach to collect and analyse data for his doctoral dissertation that explored the barriers that Nigerian women encounter in accessing equal educational opportunities. To interpret his findings, he drew guidance from critical theory and feminist education theory. Thus, there is precedent research which has used theory only for interpretation, while sticking to the principles that guide a phenomenological study. On the other hand, some doctoral research has used theory in reverse ways, that is to inform data collection and analysis while phenomenological principles informed data interpretation e.g. studies by George (2018) and Tefera (2012). This study, however, chose to use Appadurai's theorization of the capacity to aspire as the interpretive framework for the phenomenological findings.

In summary, adopting phenomenology as a philosophical framework mean three things for this study. First, context matters (see Larkin et al. 2006; Smith et al. 2009). This meant that the essence of the young people's lived experiences were explored by engaging with their verbal and written descriptions of these experiences, and the interpretation of these experiences was carried out by situating and relating it to their immediate and wider context. In this study, the context was both geographical (Nigeria's education, examination and societal system) and theoretical (using Appadurai's (2013) framework that involved the conceptual engagement with the construct – 'Capacity to aspire'). Thus, the contextual framing of young people's lived experiences in terms of their temporal (time), spatial (location) and social (people) positioning and relationships was important in this study. Secondly, Theory was used during the interpretation of findings to add more layers of meanings. The first layer of interpretation occurred by exploring the meanings that converged, diverged and emerged across the textual descriptions of lived experiences while staying open to the possibilities of multiple interpretations (Larkin et al. 2006; Smith et al. 2009). Phenomenology actively encourages different levels of interpretation such as the descriptive, linguistic and conceptual (Finlay, 2014). Thus, there is no strict adherence to any single form of interpretation (Crowther et al. 2017; Larkin et al, 2006). This is aimed at

producing concrete and concise account of the pattern of meaning-making in the lived experiences (Smith et al. 2009). Thirdly, experience is prioritised over the individual. This study emphasized experiences in terms of detail, issues and events, and not necessarily a focus on the individual per se. This is because experience is "uniquely embodied, situated and perspectival….an *in-relation-to* phenomenon, it is not really a *property* of the individual per se" (Smith et al. 2009, p. 29). This is the reason behind the emphasis in this study on unintended consequences for secondary school leavers who were aspiring to go to higher education and not just any secondary school leaver.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a Mixed Methods phenomenological research (MMPR) design (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014, 2015). This means that both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were utilized within a phenomenological study. Although a phenomenological positioning lends itself more to qualitative methods of data collection, the quantitative method employed in this research (Questionnaire) was operationalised in a way that did not compromise the assumptions implicit in a phenomenological positioning. The fact that a particular philosophical positioning lends itself more to particular research methods, does not negate the possibilities of using other types of research methods within that position (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (1994; 2005) have argued that it is the simultaneous mixing of different philosophical positioning that is problematic and not the mixing of methods because the mixing of different methods can be appropriate, logical and commensurable within one philosophical position. For instance, many researchers have successfully and justifiably incorporated quantitative methods into phenomenological studies (e.g. Sellers, 2016; Mcdonald et al. 2015; Winston, et al. 2010; Robbins & Vandree, 2009). In their comprehensive review of Mixed Methods Phenomenological studies, Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie (2014) found twenty-four empirical studies that evidently incorporated mixed methods into a phenomenological approach between 2003 and 2012, although to varying extents and with different methods.

The choice of mixed methods within any research mostly depends on the purpose of wanting to 'mix' the methods that appear paradigmatically or methodologically different (Morgan, 2006). In this study, the purpose of using mixed methods was 'complementarity' (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Complementarity describes the purpose of using both quantitative and qualitative methods together in a single study, to assess different but related aspects of the same phenomenon, in order to either enrich or elaborate on the research findings (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). This approach allows researchers to study different aspects of the same phenomenon, thereby increasing the quantity and quality of evidence about that phenomenon (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011, Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

There were two rationales for collecting quantitative data in this study. First, the quantitative findings provided data about the consequences of High-stakes testing based on participants views and hypothetical preferences on a vignette-based questionnaire. This was achieved by providing answers to the first research question that asked:

RQ1: What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs)?

This was used to complement the findings from the qualitative data, which looked at the consequences based on lived experiences, thereby elaborating on the qualitative data findings. Secondly, the findings from the quantitative data were used to contextualise the findings from the qualitative phenomenological phase, thereby enriching what is known about the perceptions of young people in the Nigerian context. Contextualising the findings was necessary because of the absence of the views of young people in the Nigerian literature on High-stakes examination and post-secondary aspirations.

However, this study prioritises the Qualitative phase because of its focus on examining the lived experiences of High-stakes testing and inclusion of the voices of young people in the High-stakes testing discourse. Furthermore, because it is a phenomenological research which

is concerned with the essence of a phenomenon, qualitative methods are more effective for addressing the research aim. Thus, the findings from the qualitative phase provided the basis for addressing the second research question as follows:

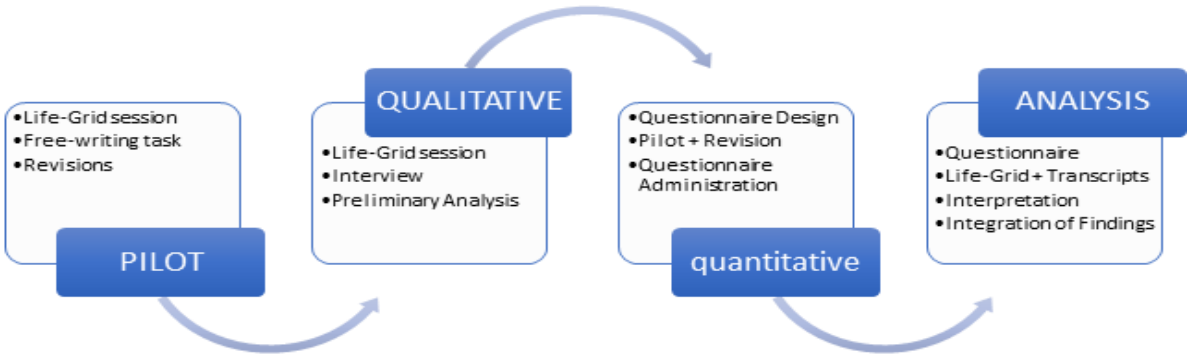
RQ2: How does the lived experience of the exit CEs affect secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?

To address the research aim which sought to establish the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing on young people aspiring to go onto higher education in the Nigerian context, the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phase were integrated and used to address the third research question which asked:

RQ3: *What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?*

Data collection was designed to begin with the qualitative phase after the pilot phase and to use the findings from the qualitative phase to inform the design and development of the questionnaire that was administered in the quantitative phase. Afterwards, the findings from both phases of data collection were integrated to help establish the wider social and educational context, within which High-stakes examinations are experienced in Nigeria, as well as increase the amount and quality of evidence about how the High-stakes examinations are experienced, and how they affect higher education aspirations. The diagram below illustrates the research design:

MIXED METHODS PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH (MMPR) DESIGN



The Qualitative phase happened before the quantitative phase for practical reasons. First, this phase was designed to provide additional guidance on the kind of questions that were useful and necessary to ask in the questionnaire. Secondly, it was pragmatic to attend to the main phase of the research first before collecting complementary evidence, when time and resources were put into consideration. It is important to mention that the use of mixed methods within a phenomenological study is not unproblematic, as with any other research. Therefore, Brannen and Nilsen (2007) advocate for researchers to be upfront about the assumptions underlying the integration of the data and critically reflect on the methodological consequences of the mixed methods strategy. In section 4.8, these assumptions are discussed.

4.4 SAMPLING STRATEGY

Purposive sampling was employed for both phases of data collection. Purposive sampling involves the selection of participants based on criteria that are connected to the research questions and/or aims (Bryman, 2016). In line with the research aim and questions, the following criteria informed the selection of the sample for both phases:

i. Completion of senior secondary school education
ii. Completion of at least one secondary school exit certificate examination and having seen the result of the examination(s)
iii. Aspiring to go onto higher education; but actively in the process of re/taking required examinations for HE entry; hence, not yet in mainstream higher education.
iv. Domiciled in Awka, Anambra State, South-East Nigeria at the time of data collection.

An effort was made to ensure sample diversity in terms of gender and disciplinary path, albeit not representatively, by providing both males and females across different disciplinary paths with the research information and opportunity to decide to participate. The rationale for this was to accommodate a wider range of experiences.

4.4.1 Research Context / Sites

All data collection took place at Awka, Anambra State, South-East Nigeria due to the convenience it afforded in terms of cost and access since I am an indigene of Anambra State. Awka is a small urban area and the administrative capital of Anambra State (see figure 7 for the geographical positioning of Awka on Anambra's map and figure 8 below for the geographical positioning of Anambra State in Nigeria).

Figure 7: Map of Anambra State

Figure 8: Map of Nigeria with Anambra State Indicated

Source: http://logbaby.com/

Amongst Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Anambra state is the 8th most populated state with a population growth rate of 2.21% per annum (Anambra State Government, 2017). In 2016, the projected population for Anambra State was 5,527,809 against a National population of 193,392,517 people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018a). The most recent educational statistics for Anambra state that is available is sourced from the Nigeria Education Indicators 2016 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017b). In 2016, the gross enrolment rate (GER)[5] for primary school pupils was 109.28 (105.53 for boys and 113.14 for girls) in Anambra State, which is higher than the National GER of 83.81 (87.16 for boys and 80.40 for girls), implying positive attitudes towards education in the state (see figure 9 for details about the primary school population in 2016). Anambra state has six universities (four of which are private institutions), three polytechnics and a few other tertiary institutions. The federal university – Nnamdi Azikiwe university and one private university – Paul's University are situated in Awka. As of 2018, Anambra state had 1,014 public primary schools and 255 public junior secondary schools respectively (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2019a);

[5] The gross enrolment rate is the total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year.

as well as 961 private primary schools and 537 private junior secondary schools respectively (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2019b). Unfortunately, statistics on the number of senior secondary schools were not publicly available. However, as can be observed in figure 9 below, the 2016 enrolment in public senior secondary schools and Pupil/Teacher ratio (52, 458; 8/1) was higher than that of private senior secondary schools (6315; 3/1).

Figure 9: Anambra State Primary school statistics in 2016

PRIMARY SCHOOL										
Indicator	Public	Private	Total		Demographic Data			Male	Female	Both
Gender parity Index (GER)	3.2				Pop aged(6-11)			405,487	394,366	799,853
Gender parity Index (NER)	1.1				Gross (apparent) intake rate			47.69	50.97	49.31
Gender Gap (Gross)	77.9				Gross enrolment ratio			105.53	113.14	109.28
% Female Pupil	85.25	50.40	75.73		Transition rate to PRY 1			0.00	0.00	0.00
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	54	8	20		Completion Rate			100.76	110.14	105.38
Pupil/Qualified Teacher Ratio	51	16	32		Net Enrolment Ratio			90.19	97.58	93.83
Pupil Classroom Ratio	40				Survival rate			100.27	105.88	103.08
Teacher/Classroom Ratio					Out of School			49,319		
	ALL SCHOOLS				PUBLIC SCHOOL			PRIVATE SCHOOL		
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Enrolment in Primary	427924	446180	874104		63173	365051	428224	79853	81129	160982
Aged(6-11)	365727	384806	750533							
Enrolment in (PRY) 1	70102	73124	143226		54659	57424	112,083	15443	15700	31,143
Number of Teachers	12270	16763	29033		514	7473	7,987	11756	9290	21,046
No. of Qualified Teachers	8497	9893	18390		514	7873	8,387	7983	2020	10,003
% Qualified Teachers	69.25	59.02	63.34		100	105	105	68	22	48
Total No. of class rooms	14633.00									

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2017b)

Another important observation from figure 9 above is the Gender Parity Index[6] of 1.1, suggesting that education is considered valuable for both gender in the state. In fact, between 2011 and 2015, the GER for the girls was slightly higher than the boys. For the junior secondary school in 2016 for both sexes, the GER was much lower at 23.50 (22.57 for boys and 24.46 for girls) and further lower for senior secondary schools at 15.02 (13.69 for boys and 16.38 for girls). Compared to a National GER of 43.09 (44.94 for boys and 41.19 for girls) and 34.95 (37.15 for boys and 32.67 for girls) for Junior and Senior Secondary schools respectively, there are unresolved questions in Nigeria's literature about why this is the case.

[6] Gender parity index is an indicator of The Percentage of Female to Male value of a given indicator. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes.

Additional details about the Junior and Secondary schools are provided in figures 10 and 11 below:

Figure 10: 2016 Junior Secondary school statistics for Anambra State

JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL									
Indicator	Public	Private	Total		Demographic Data	Male	Female	Both	
Gender parity Index (GER)	1.1				Pop aged(12-14)	204,084	198,486	402,570	
Gender parity Index (NER)	1.0				Gross (apparent) intake rate	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Gender Gap (Gross)	1.9				Gross enrolment ratio	22.57	24.46	23.50	
% Female Pupil	51.36	50.85	51.31		Transition rate to JS 1	24.03	23.36	23.69	
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	13	3	10		Completion Rate	20.62	23.71	22.14	
Pupil/Qualified Teacher Ratio	14	5	12						
Pupil Classroom Ratio	0				Survival rate	64.13	65.82	65.01	
Teacher/Classroom Ratio									
	ALL SCHOOLS				PUBLIC SCHOOL			PRIVATE SCHOOL	
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Enrolment in JSS	46064	48548	94612		41590	43920	85510	4474	4628	9102
Enrolment in (JSS) 1	16669	16715	33384		14829	15064	29,893	1840	1651	3,491
Number of Teachers	2650	7014	9664		1102	5513	6,615	1548	1501	3,049
No. of Qualified Teachers	1902	6110	8012		1000	5056	6,056	902	1054	1,956

Figure 11: 2016 Senior Secondary School Statistics for Anambra State

SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL									
Indicator	Public	Private	Total		Demographic Data	Male	Female	Both	
Gender parity Index (GER)	1.2				Pop aged(15-17)	198,414	192,972	391,386	
Gender parity Index (NER)	1.2				Gross (apparent) intake rate	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Gender Gap (Gross)	2.7				Gross enrolment ratio	13.69	16.38	15.02	
% Female Pupil	54.39	48.69	53.78		Transition rate to SSS 1	10.32	12.88	23.20	
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	8	3	7		Completion Rate	17.84	17.97	17.91	
Pupil/Qualified Teacher Ratio	9	5	8						
Pupil Classroom Ratio	0				Survival rate				
Teacher/Classroom Ratio									
	ALL SCHOOLS				PUBLIC SCHOOL			PRIVATE SCHOOL	
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Enrolment in SSS	27167	31606	58773		23927	28531	52458	3240	3075	6315
Enrolment in (SSS) 1	10932	12335	23267		9874	11358	21232	1,058	977	2035
Number of Teachers	2189	6520	8709		1102	5513	6615	1087	1007	2094
No. of Qualified Teachers	1526	5774	7300		1000	5056	6056	526	718	1244
% Qualified Teachers	69.71	88.56	83.82		91	92	92	48	71	59

For the qualitative phase of data collection, the research sample was enlisted from nine private tutorial centres for secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education in Awka, Anambra State, South-East Nigeria. Private tutorial centres popularly known as extramural classes or lessons is a thriving venture in the Nigerian context (Ezedinugwu, 2018). It takes the form of extra tutorials organised by schools/teachers, after school lessons (on weekdays, weekends, holidays etc) and preparatory classes for examinations. They served similar characteristics of students – secondary school leavers preparing to sit for the HE entrance examination. To select the tutorial centres, I made enquiries and got recommendations about the locations of existing tutorial centres in the city. I gained access by meeting with the gatekeepers and obtaining approval to address their students for a few minutes. After addressing the students, I often asked those who were interested to see me whenever they were free. This meant that I hung around the venues throughout the time they opened classes for the day. The decision to focus on the independent examination tutorial centres, stemmed from them being the best places to find students who met the research criteria, in large numbers. This, however, had some limitations because it excluded some types of students. For instance, some do not attend these examination tutorial centres due to finance. These tutorial centres charge similar monthly fees in the range between 3,000 and 5,000 Nigerian Naira (NGN), although one of the tutorial centres which belonged to a university and offered foundation programmes was more expensive. I witnessed several students been barred from participating in tutorial classes once they default in making payments by the monthly deadline. Some, on the other hand, don't have the time to attend extra tutorial classes perhaps because of domestic chores, family responsibilities or having taken up jobs, acquiring skills or learning a trade. Thus, this group of students may not have been part of the research sample.

4.4.2 Sample Size

4.4.2.1 Qualitative Data

Only the data of 10 participants were used in this study because they completed the three required sessions for the qualitative phase of this study. The 10 participants (5 males and 5 females) who make up the Qualitative sample volunteered from two tutorial centres and showed up during the times that meetings were scheduled. They were all aged 18 years before the data collection date to ensure valid informed consent. The volunteers were purposively selected because they met the criteria outlined in section 4.5. The sample size of 10 participants was considered adequate since three types of data were collected from each of them: Life-grid, Life-grid interview and semi-structured interview. Besides, the small sample size is strongly recommended for phenomenological studies, in order to obtain in-depth data (see Creswell, 2013; Vagle, 2014; Smith et al. 2009).

4.4.2.2 Quantitative data

277 questionnaires were returned but 9 questionnaires were excluded in the data analysis. Amongst these 9 excluded questionnaires, four of them did not attempt the vignettes (Section 4: Items 21 – 25), two of them omitted to fill their basic Information (Section 1: items 1 – 4), one indicated that she hadn't completed secondary school, one was already in Higher Education while one chose 'No' to agreeing to participate in the research. The decision to exclude those who didn't attempt the vignettes and give their basic information was because they were deemed the most important parts of the questionnaire. Therefore, only 268 questionnaires were analysed for this study. Respondents for the questionnaires were enlisted from volunteers at the nine tutorial centres. There were 112 males, 149 females, while 7 of the respondents omitted to mention their gender amongst the total 268 respondents. The heterogeneous composition of the exam tutorial centres in terms of gender and disciplinary path ensured that the composition of the Quantitative sample was diverse, although sampling was not random. While this might be a limitation, it is important to recall that the respondents come from a sub-group with clearly defined characteristics. Thus, although they cannot represent the general views/attitudes of the sub-group, they can shed light into the common as well as diverse views/attitudes of this sub-group. Therefore, the sample size of 268 for the Quantitative phase was considered sufficient for the exploratory

purpose as intended, that is to provide complementary and contextual evidence to support phenomenological interviews. It is important to emphasise that those who participated in the Qualitative phase were different from those who participated in the Quantitative phase.

4.4.3 Sample Characteristics and Implications

The first characteristics of this study's sample were that they had completed 3 years of senior secondary school. Within the Nigerian context, students who write the exit CEs are expected to be in their third year of senior secondary school. By excluding students who are not in this category, a level of homogeneity in the sample was achieved. The desire for homogeneity also informed the second characteristics of including only students who wrote at least one exit CE and had seen the result of the exit CE that they wrote. Considering that this study was interested in the perception and lived experience of the phenomenon 'High-stakes testing', it was necessary that the study sample shared a homogenous relationship to the phenomenon of interest. To further maintain a measure of this homogenous relationship, the study sample had to evidently aspire to go onto higher education, while being resident in Awka, Anambra state during the period of data collection. Robinson (2014) notes that "the extent of sample universe homogeneity that a research study aims at is influenced by both theoretical and practical factors" (p. 27). The phenomenological foundations of this study require that the sample be explicitly and sufficiently homogenous, to be able to explore the universal meanings/essence across their individual experiences. When a measure of sample homogeneity is maintained, Robinson (2014) affirms that the findings from the study can be cautiously generalised to that localised sample universe; that is, the study population of students who had completed secondary school, sat for the exit CE, seen their results and aspired to higher education.

Within this relatively homogenous study sample, some heterogeneity in relation to gender and discipline were included to accommodate a wider range of experiences. While this was not done representatively, it was diverse enough to include both males and females as well as participants/respondents from the Science, Humanities/Arts and social science disciplines.

According to Robinson (2014), heterogeneity can provide support for the generalisation of findings beyond specific characteristics and contexts. For this study, however, there were limitations on the extent of this broader generalisation of findings, because the quality of heterogeneity was constrained within a sample that was geographically, historically and concerning aspirations for higher education, relatively homogenous. Nevertheless, meaningful generalisations of themes across the individual cases/experiences during analysis were enhanced because of this heterogeneity. However, the small sample size of 10 for the qualitative phase meant that the meanings cannot define the experiences of all young people with similar characteristics within a country like Nigeria. Furthermore, since factors like ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and age that can contribute to the heterogeneity of the sample were not accounted for, some of the issues that emerged from this study can only be tentatively generalised beyond the sample that took part in the study.

4.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT

In this study, data was collected using Life-Grids and Life-grid interviews, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. At the onset of the research, there was a fourth instrument called the free-writing task. Freewriting allows participants to freely express their experience in writing however they choose (Elizabeth, 2008). The rationale for considering the use of freewriting was connected to how some researchers have used it as an inquiry method for learning about themselves and their research; with writing forms such as auto-ethnography, and autobiography (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). Again, it appeared to be a more sensitive way to collect unpleasant experiences of High-stakes testing because of its potential to be therapeutic and enlightening (Stanley, 1993). Elizabeth (2008) notes that writing is one of the therapeutic practices in psychotherapy for enhancing the psychosocial well-being of the one doing the writing. It is however important to highlight that although research is not psychotherapy, the beneficial results of using writing suggest that it can be productively adapted as a research instrument for data collection.

Using free writing can be problematic because whatever is written emerges from a construction of the self and the perceived reader, hence it is prone to credibility issues

associated with recall inaccuracy, inauthenticity and bias (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Elizabeth, 2008). Again, writing about an unpleasant experience can also pre-empt undesirable memories. Unfortunately, feedback from two participants as part of piloting the free-writing task revealed that it was going to be an ineffective research instrument because it made research participants feel as if they were writing an examination. This was probably linked to how writing amongst the target group was a core feature of schoolwork and journaling or expressive writing was uncharted territory for many of them at that stage of their lives. The free writing task was therefore discarded as a research instrument in this study. In the next section, the research instruments that were used during data collection are examined.

4.5.1 Life-Grid

The life-grid is a method for collecting structured retrospective data using a chart with rows that specify time scales and columns that represent different themes or areas of life history (Parry et al. 1999; Richardson et al. 2009). As a tool for collecting qualitative data, the life-grid is more popular in health-related studies for charting people's medical or life history (See Wilson et al. 2007; Berney and Blane, 2003; Parry et al. 1999). It is, however, gaining popularity in social science research, such as the Abbas et al (2013) 3-year mixed method longitudinal study, which used life-grids to explore and compare the educational experiences/trajectories of students in the sociology departments of four UK Universities. The life-grid is like a structured interview in format. Oliver (2010) notes that "*in the early stages of a qualitative study, the researcher is often wanting to map out the issues which the interviewee defines as important*" (p. 56). This is something that the life-grid is attested to do successfully. The purpose of using life-grid in this study was as follows:

i. To serve as a visual tool for eliciting information about the participants' academic performance and schooling history.
ii. To offer a platform for initiating rapport between the researcher and the participants before the interviews. Parry et al. (1999) note that rapport is beneficial in engendering quality and in-depth data.

iii. To help the researcher identify the significant events/issues peculiar to each research participant that will be useful to ask in subsequent interviews, in line with the phenomenological approach of the study.

In their study, Abbas et al. (2013) assert that the life-grids provided them with '*sufficiently rich*' (p. 321) biographical and comparable data and was an '*invaluable resource'* (p. 325) for subsequent interviews. This was my experience as well because the Life-Grid put participants in the zone of their schooling experience in recent years and therefore elicited quality biographical data. Again, since the life-grid was uniform across participants, it provided comparable data as well.

Another advantage of using the life-grid was that it stimulated recall as the participants attended to the items at their own pace without pressure. Besides, it gave participants a level of control in the absence of a human interrogator. However, issues like recall limitations and inaccuracies could have affected the quality of data from the life-grid method (Richardson et al. 2009; Bell, 2005). But as Parry et al. (1999) emphasize, these issues are not just peculiar to the life-grid method alone but to every method that requires the recall of retrospective data (e.g. interviews). Meaning-making is the focus of a phenomenological study. The meanings of participants' accounts, therefore, become more important than a focus on the accuracy of recall, for such kind of qualitative research (Richardson et al. 2009). Guidance for designing the life-grid was obtained from the studies that have been discussed so far. After the Life-grid was piloted, it was further revised and improved upon based on the feedback that was given by the two research participants that it was administered to (see appendix 2 for the life-grid that was used in this study). The first section of the Life-Grid asked participants basic demographical information that was used to profile them. The second section of the life-grid was a table that required the participants to fill in the subject(s) with their best and worst performance (stating the grades), most liked and most disliked subject(s), details of the school attended, Higher education aspirations and their Dream Career / Job against different schooling levels.

4.5.2 Life-Grid Interview

The life-grid interview proceeds immediately after participants complete the Life-Grid. The Life-grid responses serve as the interview guide/schedule during the Life-grid interview where participants are asked to elaborate, clarify and expatiate on their responses. The Life-Grid interview provided greater insight into the experiences of the participants in relation to their academic performance over the senior secondary schooling years and culminating in the senior school exit certificate examinations. During this interview, it became easy to see emerging patterns in their experiences and to fill in any gaps in the Life-Grid. Additional questioning that occurred during the life-grid interview involved asking participants the following questions:

1. *How did you prepare for the WAEC and/or NECO Examination(s)? Mention the people and activities that helped or frustrated your preparations.*
2. *Please, describe how you felt when you saw/received your WAEC and/or NECO examination results. Kindly express your deepest thoughts and emotions about this experience.*
3. *How did your WAEC and/or NECO examination results affect or change your initial educational plans?*
4. *Please, tell me about any incident that may have happened while you were preparing and/or writing the WAEC or NECO examinations, which you think may have affected your result/grades.*

These 4 questions were adapted from the initial free-writing task that was discarded after the pilot phase because participants preferred to talk about the task rather than write about it.

4.5.3 Semi-structured interview

Interviews are preferred as the data collection tool in phenomenological studies (Vagle, 2014). In a phenomenological interview, the interviewer must exhibit '*Deliberate naiveté,* that is, a curiosity to know, by bracketing presuppositions and ditching pre-formulated questions, when necessary (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The use of the interviews is not however unproblematic since participants' accounts can be an inaccurate representation of their experiences. (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2013). But as previously stated, the philosophical framework of this research focuses on participants' meaning making of their lived experience,

however, they represent it. This research used semi-structured interviews that were tailored according to the previous life-grid session. The semi-structured interview was scheduled on an average of 10 days interval after the Life-grid session. The least interval was 1 day for one informant and the highest interval was two weeks for three participants. Before this session for any participant, the researcher reviews their Life-grid and Life-grid interview responses to highlight relevant sections in relation to the informant's lived experiences that should be explored further. The semi-structured interview provided an opportunity to address gaps in the participant's previous accounts. Then, their educational aspirations and current educational activities are explored in-depth, in relation to what they have done and are doing to realise them. This meant that there was no uniform Topic Guide for all the participants. Rather, each participant had a topic guide that was tailored from their responses in the Life-Grid session. Below is an example of the Topic guide for two different participants as noted in my Fieldwork journal.

S/n	**Topic guide for Ada's semi-structured interview held on 15/2/2017**	**Topic Guide for Jus' semi-structured interview held on 8/2/2017**
1	What have you used your WAEC result to do so far?	How has her mum's death affected her educational plans?
2	To become the journalist you have in mind, what are the possible challenges?	What has she been doing between 2013 and 2017?
3	If you had A's in all your WAEC subjects, what course would you study?	Which other significant events have made impact on her education?
4	If you are not going after Journalism, what other course will you pursue? Why?	Why Biochemistry amongst other options?

After the interview session, a debriefing session took place for about 10 minutes. Participants were asked about their experience of the data collection sessions, what made them uncomfortable, what they recommend for improvement in the sessions as well as questions they may have. Then the details of the informed consent they gave were reiterated and they were appreciated for their participation. A phone call is also made afterwards to appreciate them for participating in the research. Unfortunately, 2 participants could not find time for

this phase, despite repeated attempts to schedule the session with them. Thus, only 11 participants concluded this second session of the Qualitative phase. Unfortunately, 1 of the 11 participants had a serious speech defect that made it extremely difficult to understand his response during the interview and transcription. Consequently, the tough decision to exclude his data from the findings was made to avoid inaccurate transcription and understanding of his responses. Therefore, data from 10 research participants were used in this study.

4.5.4 Vignette-based Questionnaire

A vignette-based questionnaire titled the 'High-Stakes Examinations and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ)' was used in this study to collect quantitative data. The purpose of the HSEEAQ was to obtain data to descriptively contextualise High-stakes testing practices in Nigeria, using secondary school leavers views and hypothetical preferences about the exit CE as it relates to realising their higher education aspirations. (Please see appendix 5 for the HSEEAQ that was used in this study). As earlier mentioned, one of the gaps in Nigeria's literature on High-stakes testing is the underrepresentation of the voices of young people who are the most important stakeholders in High-stakes testing. Therefore, to have a more robust understanding of the consequences of High-stakes testing in the Nigerian context, it was important to include the views of a wider range of young people, in addition to the lived experiences of ten research participants. Generally, questionnaires are useful for collecting information about a variable/characteristic from a specified population (Czaja & Blair, 2005).

On the other hand, vignettes are very useful for collecting sensitive information by offering respondents the advantage of detachment and depersonalisation to the issue of interest (Sadi & Basit, 2017). Vignettes use hypothetical narratives to simulate real events or people (Sadi & Basit, 2017; Spaldings & Philips, 2007). Research participants are then expected to respond to it by expressing their views or judgement about the hypothetical narrative. Vignettes are useful for studying issues that need contextualisation and sensitivity (Spaldings & Philips, 2007; Torres, 2009). Barter & Renold (2000) also notes that vignettes are flexible techniques which make them amenable to different types of studies. For instance, Barter & Renold (2000) used vignettes to explore violence in children residential homes in a qualitative study, while Goerman et al. (2011) examined how vignettes were used as part of pretesting survey

translations in a U.S. Census Bureau project. It is this flexible nature of the vignettes and its usefulness for exploring studies with sensitive undertones that informed its inclusion in the questionnaire that was used in this study.

In their study, Sadi & Basit (2017) had used "vignettes-based questionnaires" (p. 183) to examine cultural tolerance amongst secondary school girls in Oman. Their quasi-experimental study adopted a mixed methods approach, which prioritised the vignette-based questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. Their vignette-based questionnaire had 23 vignettes, that they found "*to be an effective research tool which successfully elicited responses to situations which might have been difficult to respond to*" (Sadi & Basit, 2017, p. 193). Similarly, Leighton (2010) had also used a vignette-based questionnaire to investigate mental health literacy among young people aged 12 – 15 at 6 High schools. There were 5 vignettes in the questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions, which depicted varying levels of mental health situations that were sourced from literature and medical experience. On reflection, Leighton (2010) conclude that the vignette-based questionnaire worked well for her study as it enabled her "*to obtain qualitative data from a large number of people*" (p. 241). This study, therefore, used a vignette-based questionnaire, to make it easier for the study to stimulate responses about unintended consequences of High-stakes testing that may be unpleasant to some respondents (due to poor academic performance or failure), as well as obtain qualitative data from a larger pool of Nigerian secondary school leavers who were aspiring to higher education.

Like every other research instrument, the use of a vignette-based questionnaire also has limitations. First, there have been concerns about the validity of vignettes that are used in questionnaires, as it relates to questions about how well the vignette represents the situation or people that are presented (Sadi & Basit, 2017; Finch, 1987). Related to this concern is the question about how well the outcomes or responses of the respondents is related to how they would respond if they encountered the same situation. But as Barter & Renold (2000) rightly note, the focus of the vignette is the nature and process of interpretations that respondents elicit from the hypothetical situations, and neither the correctness of the hypothetical situations nor the accuracy of their responses to the hypothetical situations. The

rationale for including the vignettes was to stimulate the interests of the respondents in critically analysing the issues that the vignettes raised and to identify the wide range of interpretations and perspectives on High-stakes testing and its consequences in Nigeria. I argue that this worked in this study because the respondents made references to their views, knowledge and personal experiences in trying to explain their hypothetical preferences.

In this study, the vignette situations were sourced from the real-life experiences of participants in the qualitative phase of data collection and the researcher's previous encounters with young people. To protect the identity of the research participants in the qualitative phase whose experiences were used, each vignette was an adaptation of their experiences with the researcher's pre-research encounters. Spalding & Philips (2007) notes that vignettes can be a *snapshot* of what the researcher has encountered, a *portrait* of participant's experience/character or a *composite* of both. The other concern about the use of a vignette-based questionnaire revolves around its design so that respondents can easily understand it (Finch, 1987). The wordings of the vignette were kept simple and the length of each vignette short (average word count across the five vignettes was 125 words).

The vignette-based questionnaire used in this study had 25 items that were grouped under the four sections as follows:

Section 1 titled 'About You' requested for basic information about the respondents, such as age and year of completing secondary school. It was made up of five (5) items: Item 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, which were used to profile the respondents.

Section 2 titled 'About Your Educational Aspirations', which sought information about respondents' educational and career aspirations consisted of five (5) items: Items 6,7,8,9 and 10. Data from this section was used to confirm and situate the respondents' aspiration to go onto higher education.

Section 3 titled 'About Secondary School Exit Certificate Examinations' consist of 10 closed-ended items (Items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20), which asked respondents about their views of the senior school exit Certificate Examinations in Nigeria. Data from this section

was used to analyse the consequences of High-stakes testing, based on perceptions. Data from this section was used to address the first sub-question of Research question 1 which asked: *What views do secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education hold concerning the exit CEs and their potential consequences?*

Section 4 titled 'About Examinations and Educational Aspirations' consist of five open-ended vignettes which requested for respondents' hypothetical actions and preferences regarding the exit CEs dilemma that was presented in the vignettes. The section consists of items 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25. Respondents were essentially asked to proffer their preferred course of action to the dilemma and explain the rationale behind their hypothetical preferences. Data from this section was used to address the second sub-question of Research question 1 which asked: *a) What are the hypothetical options of secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, when confronted with hypothetical exit CEs outcomes?*

Aside from Section 4 which contained the vignettes, developing the remaining sections drew guidance from the literature. For instance, the items in section (1) included basic background demographical information (e.g. age and gender). This was necessary to provide a robust understanding of the characteristics of young people that took part in the study. To develop the items in sections (2), specific guidance was obtained from the '*Early School Leavers Survey*' by Social Research Centre (2015) and Department of Education and Training (2015), because the audience and content of the survey aligned in some ways with my research. The items for section (3) were adapted from the items in Brockmeier et. al. (2014) and Gunn et al. (2016) surveys, which sought teachers' perceptions of High-stakes testing. Again, some of these items in the survey were relevant to my research aim and questions.

4.5.5 Piloting the Research Instruments

Pilot studies are usually conducted to ascertain the feasibility of a study, try out research instruments, develop research protocols etc. (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). In this study, piloting was done to test the effectiveness of the research instruments, revise questions, ascertain the likely problems with its implementation, and estimate the timeframe for its completion. To pilot the research instruments for the Qualitative phase, two participants were enlisted from personal connections in Ota, Ogun State, South-West Nigeria. Piloting of the Life-Grid occurred in January 2017 at this place. The location of this pilot was purely

pragmatic because access to gatekeepers/participants for the main study, which was to occur in Awka, Anambra State, South-East Nigeria was still being processed at the time. The sample comprised two secondary school leavers, one male and one female who were domiciled in that city. Their selection was purely convenience sampling as they were young people that the researcher knew from existing relationships in her immediate community. The sample size of two was informed by the need to focus on trying out the Life-grid instrument on an in-depth, personal level. The female informant was 18 years old at the time of the study, had completed secondary school in 2016, and written the exit Certificate Examinations in the same year. She was affiliated to the Science discipline and had attended a private secondary school. This informant's experience also informed the development of item 22 in the questionnaire. The male informant was 22 years old and had completed his secondary school education at a Government-owned secondary school in 2013. He sat for the exit CE that year but had to re-sit for it in 2014 because of grade deficiencies in four core subjects. This informant's experience informed the development of item 21 in the HSEEAQ.

On the other hand, piloting the vignette-based questionnaire took place in the city where all the other data collection activities held, i.e. Awka, Anambra State, South-East Nigeria. The initial drafts of the vignette-based questionnaire went through a content validation process by peers and academics, until a final draft that was piloted, reviewed and revised. It was administered to five respondents from one examination tutorial centre. The responses to the vignette-based questionnaire and the kind of questions that respondents asked while they were completing the vignette-based questionnaire informed the revision of the questionnaire. The questions they asked helped to highlight the items that were confusing or ambiguous, while their responses indicated the estimated time required to complete the questionnaire. Piloting the questionnaire occurred in two stages. It was first administered to three people, then reviewed, and revised. In the second stage, the revised questionnaire was administered to two other people, then reviewed again and revised appropriately.

For instance, typographical and grammatical structure revisions were made to improve questionnaire quality and readability. Again, the section that requested for names was removed so that respondents could respond anonymously. This was because all the

respondents during the piloting asked which name they would put in there and some were reluctant to write their name. A tick box for respondents to indicate their willingness to participate was offered instead. Negative statements were included in section 3 so that responses were not skewed in one direction. This was because it was noticed that respondents were likely to keep ticking one type of response for one type of statement. For the vignettes, including a rationale for their response was the main revision after the piloting. The final draft of the vignette-based questionnaire was then administered to potential respondents.

The Life-Grid was also piloted, and the grid was better structured based on feedback from the pilot study. Ambiguous and irrelevant terms were changed to more appropriate ones and extra themes that were useful to know were added. During the same period, the life-grid interview and free-writing task were also piloted. The free-writing task was designated to last for about 30 minutes and if a participant wanted additional time and space, they could take it home and return at an agreed date and avenue. This open-ended writing task was intended to allow participants define what poor academic performance means to them. In a subsequent interview, lived experience of the exit CE was to be addressed specifically. The free writing task was as follows:

> *Please, describe a particular educational experience during or after your time in secondary school that made you feel like a failure academically, as it happened at the time. What were the circumstances surrounding the experience and how did it make you feel? How did that experience affect you after it happened? It is important that you express your deepest thoughts and emotions about this experience. You should mention the people who contributed to that experience directly or indirectly. Don't put your name anywhere on this paper but I assure you that anything you write is confidential – just between you and I. You can also stop anytime you wish to discontinue. Thank you.*

Since writing is a form of meaning making, the expected outcome from this exercise was a personal narrative of the meanings that were associated with academic performance in the exit CEs and their account of their academic performance. The free writing product was to be thematically analysed to generate quotes, themes and codes. These would serve as a resource

and interview guide for a subsequent interview. It would also inform the design of the open-ended items for the questionnaire as well as constitute part of the research's findings/meta-inferences.

As earlier noted, the pilot study informed the discarding of the free-writing task and the incorporation of its prompts into the questions that participants were asked during the life-grid interview. Another thing that was learnt from piloting was regarding logistics. The pilot sessions for the life-grid, free writing task and interviews (qualitative phase of the study) held in the researcher's house because the participants' residences could not provide privacy for the sessions. This raised ethical issues surrounding power relations and its influence on the data collected. In addition, covering the transportation costs to my residence would be a problem. As a result, I decided that for the main data collection, the locations where I met the participants would be used as the data collection venue. Another issue that the pilot highlighted was how participants could be compensated for their time in the absence of a reward for participation. So, I decided to at least provide refreshments during the main data collection sessions.

Again, at the onset of the research, I was particularly interested in getting participants who may have obtained D, E or F grades in any of the CE subjects because initially, I wanted to focus on the consequences of experiencing low achievement in the High-stakes examinations. This decision was however revised after the Piloting of the Qualitative research instruments. By reviewing the Pilot, I discovered two problems with getting this kind of participant sample. First, not all the subjects that students write in the examinations are important to their educational aspirations, even though they had enrolled for them in the examination. They are expected to enrol for a minimum of eight subjects in these examinations but only require credit grades and above in five core subjects to pursue their educational aspirations. Therefore, not getting a Credit grade in non-core subjects made no impact. That is, a low achievement grade in core subjects is weightier than some other subjects. For instance, Grades D, E or F in English and Maths for all the disciplines is a problem. However, an F grade in Biology is irrelevant to a student who wants to study French at the university. A 'D' grade in Economics does not matter to a student who wants to study Medicine in the university if

that student made Credit grades and above in English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. Therefore, selecting potential participants based on the number or level of grades they have was problematic.

Again, it was difficult to get information about poor grades during the stage of soliciting participants involvement in the study. Disclosing their examination grades was an awkward place to begin a conversation and had the potential of making participants uncomfortable, defensive and unwilling to participate in the study. I learnt that it was after a rapport has been successfully established that participants feel comfortable enough to disclose any seemingly unpleasant experience in the High-stakes examinations. Furthermore, students could interpret low achievement differently. I spoke to a female who seemingly had good grades in the exit CEs by the standards of what had been stipulated as the minimum benchmark for the CEs. However, she pointed out how grades were used in a point-based system of accumulating points for those who were seeking admission into higher education the previous year. This meant that despite that a C grade is also a grade for successful outcomes, it was often not good enough when allocated points. It was better to have grades like A and B. So, although she described her result as good, she felt it was not good enough for the cut off to study medicine. While she did not intend to retake the exit CEs, she chose to change her educational aspiration to Nursing, to increase her chances of promptly going onto higher education.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

4.6.1 Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase of the research was carried out between February 2017 and March 2017. However, qualitative data was collected from one informant in May 2017 because she was not available earlier. The data collection process began with scouting for participants at the research sites previously described. For the qualitative phase, general information about the research was presented to classes full of students after permission had been obtained from the gatekeepers. Those who are interested in knowing more about the research and how to participate were kindly asked to reach out to me afterwards. Sometimes, I also walked

up to some of the students at the research sites individually to solicit their participation after introducing myself and explaining what the research was all about. Some students decide immediately to participate, while some others indicate that they weren't interested or were unable to participate due to the criteria. Then some requested for more time to think about it. These are followed up with a phone call. However, there were instances where willing volunteers were politely turned down because they did not meet the criteria. When someone indicates interest in participating in the study, the research is explained again, and their enquiries are attended to. Afterwards, they are given the informed consent form to complete. They can choose to complete it immediately and return to the researcher or take it home to return on another day. Most of the participants chose the option of filling it immediately. Their phone numbers were then collected, and a call later made to schedule the first Life-grid session. Before the administration of the Life-Grid, a session was held with each participant to provide them with detailed information about the research, answer their questions, obtain their informed consent and schedule a time for the Life-Grid session. On the day of the Life-Grid session, permission to record the Life-Grid interview was obtained. Then, the participant was given the Life-Grid to complete.

Completing the life-grid often required about 10 minutes, after which the researcher spends about 2 minutes to study the informant's response. It was their responses to this Life-grid that formed the topic guide for the life-grid interview, which took place immediately. The life-grid interview was audio-recorded and the transcript used in conjunction with the life-grid during analysis. This is similar to how the Life-Grid was used in the Wilson et al. (2007) and Parry et al (1999) studies. There, the discussions around the Life-Grid served as the main qualitative data with the Life-Grid serving as a visual facilitating tool within an interviewing framework. 13 Participants (6 males and 7 females) completed this life-grid. The Life-grid interview often lasted about 20 minutes. There were instances when it was shorter because of time constraints by the participants and there were instances it lasted for about 30 minutes or more. All the 13 participants who completed the Life-grid also completed the Life-grid interview. The conclusion of the life-grid interview marked the end of the Life-grid session. After this session, the semi-structured interview is scheduled for another day, either immediately or through a subsequent phone call. After the semi-structured interview session,

the debriefing of the participants was held immediately, during which research participants are asked to give feedback about their experience in the research process, a reiteration of their rights to withdraw and the next step of the research. All the sessions with the research participants held at the venue of the examination tutorial centres' but outside the regular hours of their lessons. Both data collection sessions were audio-recorded, and permission to do so is included in the informed consent that participants provide.

Data collection was not without its challenges. The first challenge had to do with the venue for collecting data, especially Qualitative data. The ethical and financial implications of collecting the data elsewhere meant that data collection had to hold at the venues where the participants were recruited. For the Life-grid and interview sessions, the venue and seating provisions were inconvenient most of the time. The examination tutorial centres where the participants had their classes, used underserved public primary schools after school hours (perhaps to cut down the cost associated with renting a venue). This meant that the seats were suited for primary school pupils but inconvenient for grown-ups. The pictures below show the kind of seats that had to be used. Furthermore, there was a lack of privacy for all the sessions because they had to hold in open classroom spaces that are at best demarcated from other classroom spaces by a vertical wooden board, and often demarcated by nothing. For instance, in the 1st picture below, there are two classrooms behind me demarcated only by the type of pillar that I was standing beside.

Figure 12: Fieldwork @ classrooms without privacy

Figure 13: Fieldwork with Inconvenient seats

Another problem with the use of these under-resourced government-owned primary schools had to do with Timing. These schools closed by 2 pm, although those in the nursery section closed earlier. Then, the exam tutorial centres commenced their lessons at about 3.30 pm. Most of my participants chose to have their research sessions before the exam lessons commenced. Unfortunately, some of the primary school pupils do not leave the school premises immediately after 2 pm. It is therefore usual to see them running around and making lots of noise. Thus, there are audio recordings with noise interferences and there were times I had to suddenly address the source of noise during a research session. Meeting with participants outside the school days did not work out. The first person I arranged to meet with on a Saturday did not turn up until after two hours. The second person did not turn up at all, did not cancel and I could not reach him on his phone. The third person who scheduled a Sunday cancelled while I was already at the school venue waiting for her. Another challenge with timing had to do with the quantity of time available for each session. There were several occasions when there was a limited time for in-depth interviews because the participants came late and had to join the exam tutorials in a short while. While the obvious option would have been to reschedule, it was not a viable option because it was not always easy to get them to turn up in the first place. There was one occasion when a participant came very late, so I had to give him the life-grid to take home and complete. This resulted in the follow-up life-grid interview being merged with the semi-structured interview and carried out on the same day. This was the participant who turned up two hours late when he scheduled the session for a Saturday. For some of the interviews, more time would have allowed a thicker description of their lived experiences.

4.6.2 Quantitative Phase

The preliminary analysis of some of the qualitative data was implemented from March 2017 to April 2017 and used to develop the questionnaire for the quantitative phase. During the quantitative phase which commenced in May 2017, a questionnaire was administered to 277 respondents. However, only 268 completed questionnaires were analysed because the rest had inadequately filled the questionnaire or did not meet basic criteria. For the quantitative phase, the students were provided with information about the research, whether as a group or individually, and consent is obtained from those who indicate a willingness to respond to

the questionnaires. Then, the questionnaire is administered at the venue of the tutorial centres and returned to the researcher immediately or at a more convenient time that is agreed between both parties. There were isolated instances where potential respondents requested to be allowed to take the questionnaire home and return on a later date. Unfortunately, almost half of the questionnaires that were meant to be returned on a later date were never returned. When I tried to recover the completed questionnaires; I could not reach some of them on the phone numbers they gave to me while another kept procrastinating about bringing the completed questionnaire and another could not arrange a convenient meeting with me. Nonetheless, the study had a high response rate of 268 completed questionnaires. In the next section, the procedures for analysing all the data that were collected are discussed.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Since both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, it meant that the analytic methods for both data were different. Again, for the vignette-based questionnaire which required both closed and open-ended responses, there was a need to analyse the vignettes differently from the Likert-scale part of the questionnaire. The processes through which all the data were analysed is discussed in the subsequent sub-sections.

4.7.1 Qualitative Data

Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the transcripts of the life-grid session and the semi-structured interview session. Thematic analysis is an analytic method that is "*essentially independent of theory and epistemology and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches*" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 78). This makes it flexible for use within a phenomenological framework. Using Thematic Analysis, themes within the data were identified using an inductive data-driven technique, which codes data "*without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions*" (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 83). According to Smith et al. (2009), an analysis that is informed by phenomenology must focus on participants' meaning making of the lived experience of a phenomenon. To do this, the induced meanings must be contextualized by iteratively analysing parts in relation to

the whole and vice versa, to understand how the subject makes sense of their experience of the subject matter (Smith, 2011; Larkin et al. 2006). Smith et al. (2009) note that this iterative relationship usually occurs in the interaction between a word to a sentence, a specific story to a general narrative, an interview transcript to the research questions etc., but it must be done inductively and iteratively. The guidelines they offer which were adopted by this research are summarised as follows:

- Actively engage and get immersed in the data
- identify themes and structures, contradictions and nuances, convergence and commonalities
- describe emergent themes in each case and across cases.
- develop a pattern of relationship between emergent themes
- Interpret emergent patterns by situating them in a wider social and theoretical context. In this study, Appadurai's (2013) conception of the 'Capacity to Aspire' was employed at this point to situate the emergent patterns in a theoretical context.
- audit the appropriateness and coherence of interpretation across all cases
- construct a detailed narrative that interpretively describes how participants make sense of their experience using their accounts, the coded themes and data extracts.
- reflect on the interpretation exercise

The NVivo software was used during the process of identifying the themes iteratively and inductively, and there were times when coding was done manually on the word document of the transcripts (*Please see Appendix 9 for the emergent themes using NVivo for four research participants as examples*). First, the transcripts were approached with a 'phenomenological attitude'. This involved my tacit acknowledgement of the limitations of what I knew about the phenomenon of interest. It also meant that I opened up my mind to the possibilities of multiple interpretations of the text I was about to engage with. There were no pre-defined themes for categorising the understandings from the lived experiences. Rather, the text was approached with a willingness to allow the participants speak about their experience through the transcript, and an openness of mind to deduce the meanings therein. Finlay (2014) notes that adopting this phenomenological attitude is challenging for researchers and it is an attitude that must be consciously and continuously adopted throughout the research process.

The second stage of the analysis involved the researcher immersing herself in the transcript data. Finlay (2014) refers to this process as '*dwelling*' and asserts that '*as we dwell, new understandings emerge; data are transformed into meanings*" (Ibid. p. 125). I achieved this immersion in the transcript data by doing the following:

a. Transcribing the audio recordings, myself.
b. Listening to the audio recordings as often as necessary.
c. Reading the transcript multiple times.

   According to Crotty (1998), there are three common ways of reading and making sense of textual accounts. Using an 'emphatic' approach, the text is read and interpreted by trying to gain perspective through the author's viewpoint, that is, the reader puts him/herself in the author's shoes. With an 'interactive' approach, the reader is in a dialogue with the textual data. A 'transactional' approach would involve the reader engaging with the textual data in ways that generate insights that are not immediately obvious. At this stage of the reading, I adopted the 'emphatic' approach.

d. I took notes as I tried to gain understanding and make sense of the accounts.

In the third stage of the analysis, I identified incidences and small text passages that express distinct meanings and grouped them under chunks of related meanings. Then, I use these chunks of related meanings to build up a Lived Experience Description (LED) for each transcript data. An 'interactive' approach was adopted at this point to make sense of the data (*Examples of the LED are the Lived Experience Descriptions for Ude, Abi, Chi and Isa in Appendices 10, 11, 12, and 13*). At the fourth stage, I began to code words, phrases or passages into themes that articulated their meanings. A 'transactional' approach was employed to engage with the transcript at this point (*please see Appendices 11 & 12 for all the themes for the 10 research participants*). Then, related themes were linked together, and patterns identified. This involved the clustering of general or specific meanings that emerge within one case and across different cases. At the fifth stage, with a focus on the phenomenon of interest (the lived experience of the exit CE), a thematic structure condensing the meanings of the experience was developed, described and illustrated using relevant quotations from

the data as evidence. Finally, key themes were abstracted from this thematic structure and reported by engaging with existing literature. These key themes and their sub-themes are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Key Themes from the thematic Structure

KEY THEMES	SUB-THEMES
AGENCY	Exercised Agency
	Constrained Agency
HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS	Shapers of aspirations
	Aspirational choices
	Course / institutional aspirations
	Career aspirations
	Crossroads
	Changes
	Motivations
EXAM MALPRACTICES	Special Centres
	Modus Operandi
	Secondary School Ethos
SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	Aspirational Choices
	Examination experience
	Secondary school experience
	People (Mum, Dad, Teachers, Peers)
EXIT CE EXPERIENCE	Preparations
	Examination
	Results
	Consequences / effects/impact
SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE	Teachers / Teaching
	Subject
	School
THE SELF	Beliefs/morals
	Life history
	Learning style
CRITICAL EVENTS	Difficulties
	Death
	Transitions
POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE	HE Entry exams (UTME)
	Economic activities e.g. job

It is important to also mention that a preliminary analysis of the qualitative data commenced in the field before the quantitative phase began. This was because the findings were needed to inform the development of the vignette-based questionnaire. Preliminary analysis meant that analysis stopped at the 3rd stage when the Lived Experience Description (LED) was produced for the participants, and the outcome of that analysis was used to design five vignettes in the questionnaires. After the fieldwork, the complete process of thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data.

4.7.2 Quantitative Data

Two types of analysis were carried out on the vignette-based questionnaire. For sections 1, 2 and 3; descriptive statistical analysis using frequency counts, Percentage distributions, measures of central tendency and some cross-tabulations were used to describe the patterns in respondents' characteristics and views. Recall that section 1 (items 1 – 5) asked questions about respondents' characteristics, section (items 6 – 10) asked questions about respondents educational and career aspirations, section 3 (items 10 – 20) were Likert scale type of questions which asked about the views of the respondents in relation to the exit CE while section 4 (items 21 – 25) were vignette questions that simulated hypothetical experiences of the exit CE. For the vignette items under section 4, Thematic analysis was used to categorise the different responses (findings are in the next chapter) while descriptive statistics were used to report the frequency of particular themes emerging from the vignette data. The NVivo software was used to conduct the thematic analysis on the vignettes by coding into nodes (the NVivo lingo for categories), categorising the nodes into themes/concepts and finding relationships between the emergent themes/concepts.

For the Descriptive analysis, the responses for each of the 268 vignettes-based questionnaires were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Then, the data were sorted and entered into the SPSS software for descriptive analysis. As earlier stated, the purpose of the questionnaire was to provide contextual and complementary information about the perceived consequences of High-stakes testing with the Nigerian context. Therefore, the

questionnaire was designed to collect mainly descriptive data from the respondents. In addition, since the 268 respondents were not randomly selected because participation in the research was entirely voluntary and the quantitative findings were considered exploratory; inferential statistics could not be applied to the data collected from this sample.

4.8 RESEARCH QUALITY

To define validity for the different methods that make up a mixed methods research, several authors have suggested the use of terms like 'Legitimation' by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) and 'Inference quality' by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003). These terms are intended to encapsulate what validity represents in terms of the criteria for the quality of Qualitative and Quantitative methods. In this study, Guba and Lincoln's (2005) criteria for quality in terms of research rigour in the application of the methods and process of interpretation is adopted because of its comprehensive offerings and user-friendliness. First, this chapter has paid careful attention to providing an authentic account of how the methods were rigorously applied and how data interpretation was systematically achieved. Secondly, this study addressed quality concerns surrounding data integration. According to Bazely (2018), the distinguishing characteristics of any research that is truly mixed methods is Data integration. Data integration means that there is an interdependent interaction between the different research methods, which is evident at all the points of the research design, implementation and analysis, prior to the conclusion(s) been drawn (Yin, 2006; Bazeley, 2018).

Data integration can occur at four stages of the research – Research Questions/Problem, Data Collection, Data Analysis and Data Interpretation (Creswell et. al., 2003). This study focused on Data Integration at the Data interpretation stage by asking a third research question, which specifically demanded findings and interpretations that emerge from combining both the qualitative and quantitative data. The data from the questionnaire was used to address the first research question that asked "*What are the perceived consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate examination by secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education?* Data from the Qualitative phase was used to address the second research question which asked: *RQ2: How does the lived experience of the exit CEs influence secondary*

school leavers' aspirations for higher education? Then, Data from the qualitative phase was integrated with data from the quantitative phase during interpretation to address the third research question which asked: *What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?* That is, the lived experiences of Nigeria's High-stakes examination by a selected few was situated descriptively within the attitudinal responses of a wider pool of secondary school leavers. The underlying assumption in this is that since the small qualitative sample and the large quantitative sample come from the same group, then the common responses to the examination-related requirements for higher education that was identified during the quantitative phase can account for that group in some ways, albeit not representatively.

Finally, in any research, the main instrument is the researcher since they collect data, analyse it and present the findings (Mertens, 2010). Inevitably, the researcher brings to the research, personal experiences and roles that can likely impact on the dynamics of the research process (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The roles and experiences that I brought to this research were in four dimensions. First was my positioning as a researcher who shared similar experience in the past to the experience I now explored. I was therefore very conscious of ensuring that I was not telling my story and speaking my voice in place of the stories/voices of my participants. It was also important that as I interpreted their experiences, I stayed continuously aware and critical of my personal experience as I engaged with participants' experiences. Since I must inevitably draw from my experiences to understand their experiences, my experience needed to serve merely as a resource. That way, it can enrich the quality/credibility of my research, as Gough (2003) suggests. Again, the sampling strategy for this study which did not specify the kind of exit CE results that research participants should have, accommodated diversity in the exit CE experiences (thus several experiences were very different to my personal experience). Another positioning I brought to the research was my identity as an adult in the Nigerian context, which introduced a power dynamic. Edwards & Holland (2013) emphasises that data collection processes like interviews are mediated by power dynamics associated with differences/similarities in age, gender, socio-economic status and any other dimension that make up identity. My participants were mostly in their

late teens and early twenties, hence there was a reasonable age difference between us. Participants therefore consciously related to me as an adult; by assigning formality, authority, culturally emphasized deference and outsider status to my role. This may likely have had an impact on the quantity and quality of experiences that they chose to share with me. Again, considering my 'adult' status, there was the danger of presenting themselves in a positive light, as adults expected of them. Something I tried to do was build rapport with them through consistently showing up in their exam tutorial centres and chatting with them outside the data collection period. Furthermore, I continued to reiterate that there was no right or wrong answer during the data collection sessions. I emphasized that I was just trying to understand their experience, not judge them.

My third positioning in this research was linked to my identity as a PhD student in a foreign university. This meant that I was likely perceived as privileged and an outsider in an already unequal power relationship since I represented someone who had 'conquered' the examination system and was wealthy because I school abroad. Gough (2003) notes that inequalities in researcher-participant relationships are inevitable. Nonetheless, I was cautious to not relate with participants in a disempowering way. Finally, before commencing the PhD programme, I worked for four months in one of the Examining Agencies that administer the exit CEs. This working experience gave me privileged information about the CE administration system. Thus, when my participants said things that were seemingly inaccurate or biased against these exam agencies, I ensured that I kept my defence of the exam agencies and opinion to myself because the focus of my research wasn't fact-finding but telling the story of my participants based on their lived experiences.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Much thought was given to ethics with guidance from the ethical procedures of the School of Education (University of Bristol), BERA's (2011) ethical guidelines, research ethics literature and the research requirements of the Nigerian government. Before the commencement of the research, ethical approval to conduct the research was received from the University of Bristol (*see appendix 13)*. This involved having discussions with a PhD colleague who was

familiar with the Nigerian context about ethical issues surrounding fieldwork in the Nigerian context and with another PhD colleague about ethical issues surrounding research methods generally, in addition to reading recommended literature on ethically conducting research. This helped with anticipating possible ethical dilemma and potential ways to address them, if necessary (*please see appendix 7 for the ethics form that was submitted*). Furthermore, the codes of ethical practice for the University of Bristol was strictly followed. The ethical practices that were applied in this study are summarised below:

4.9.1 Access / Exit

The research sites were accessed legitimately after obtaining approval from the appropriate gatekeepers. To exit any research site, the appropriate gatekeepers were notified and appreciated. The research participants who took part in the Qualitative phase of the research were also notified of the imminent conclusion of the data collection activity before the last session occurred. Then, after that session, a debriefing was done after which they were verbally appreciated in person and through a subsequent phone call.

4.9.2 Informed Consent

To gain informed consent, information was presented to potential participants in three stages. In the first encounter, the researcher and the research aim were introduced to them. Then, they were told how they could participate, the criteria for participation, expectations from them and the intrinsic benefits for them if they chose to take part in the study. They were clearly informed that there was no monetary or material benefit, but it was an opportunity for their voices/stories to be heard through a medium that could contribute to knowledge, and which might potentially help other young people. When they indicated interest, then the second encounter would involve going through the research information together and highlighting what they should expect from the researcher in terms of confidentiality, data use and storage, right to withdraw at any time, while any further queries that they may have will be addressed. If they express a willingness to participate in the research, then they were expected to sign the informed consent form. Otherwise, they were thanked and left alone (Please see appendix 4 for the research information sheet).

4.9.3 Participants' Rights and Safety

Participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without providing explanations to the researcher. For such people, the data they have provided until that point was excluded from the research data. All the sessions with participants held in a corner away from the group, so that although others could see us, they could not hear our discussion. While the fact that we could be seen might be problematic, but that was the best provision that could be made considering the context. Nonetheless, the confidentiality of participants' identity and data was assured by storing their data on a password-encrypted laptop. No picture or video was taken of the research participants at any time. For those who were interviewed, permission was obtained for them to be audio-recorded. The researcher is the only one with access to the data they provided and their complete identity. Throughout this report, the real identity of the research participants and anything that could identify them have been withheld and pseudonyms have been used wherever they were quoted. My email address was on the research information sheet that they were given. Hence, they could reach me at any time if they had concerns/questions. If they had complaints about my dealings with them, my supervisor's email address was also on the information sheet, to whom they could channel their complaints to. During the study, I was very sensitive to issues that could potentially disconcert the participant and I continued to remind them that they could discontinue the sessions at any time if they so choose.

4.9.4 Questionnaire Respondents

For the questionnaire, the main ethical issue after obtaining respondents' voluntary participation in the protection of their confidentiality, such that their personal information cannot be linked to their responses (Fowler, 2009; Czaja & Blair, 2005). To deal with this, the names of the respondents were not solicited. Oliver (2010) observes that this creates tension when there is a need to authenticate the research through real names. Identifying each respondent with a unique ID number that is linked to each questionnaire was used, a compromise that Fowler (2009) recommends. Secondly, the forms were administered and collected personally by the researcher.

4.9.5 Relational Ethics

To foster an ethical relationship of trust and reciprocity between the researcher and the researched, mutual respect as well as responsibility to self and the other are important (Pollard, 2015). In this study, I was very conscious of the power dynamics between me and the research participants because of the age and educational difference as I mentioned previously. So, I focused on building rapport and friendship with them outside the research sessions. One of the issues with that was the expectation that some of them began to place in me. There were two instances where research participants solicited money from me directly for their issues. The ethical dilemma for me was on the impact it would have on data quality depending on the kind of response I gave to the requests. For one of them, the request came after the data collection sessions had been concluded, so it was easy to refuse the request. It, however, raised the moral dilemma of reciprocity considering that he had previously given me his time and experience at no cost. So, I compensated by regularly checking on him and the progress he had made to resolve the issue he needed my assistance for. For the other person, it was more difficult to refuse her request because data collection with her was still in progress and I had the means to help. I had to be upfront with her about how I wasn't permitted to give her money during the research so as not to compromise the data I get. I, however, compensated the refusal by advising on alternative ways to address the issue. Another way I fostered trust was ensuring that all the interactions with the research participants held within the premises of the tutorial centres. When research participants scheduled meetings during the weekend when the schools are not usually open, I sought approval to use the school premises. For instance, I once liaised with a teacher who was kind enough to give me the key to her classroom and directed me to leave the key with the security staff afterwards.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The methodology adopted for this research was the Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) approach. Data was collected using Life-grid, Interviews and a Questionnaire, to address the research aim of examining the unintended consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certifications (exit CEs) for secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education. Data collection was inhibited by the time available to interact with

participants and the location where data was collected. Nonetheless, qualitative data was successfully collected from 10 participants, while 268 returned questionnaires were completed satisfactorily. The phenomenological underpinnings of this study informed the way that Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the Qualitative data, as well as the way that descriptive statistics was used in analysing the vignette-based Questionnaire. Whilst there were research quality concerns that emerged from how the Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) design was implemented, the researcher maintains that the research process was rigorous as possible within the resource constraints of a PhD research. The chapter ends with a discussion on the ethical issues that were put into consideration in this study. In the next chapter, the findings from the Quantitative phase of the research are presented.

CHAPTER 5

PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF THE SENIOR SCHOOL EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (EXIT CE)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the findings from the analysis of the responses to the High Stakes Examinations and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ), a vignette-based questionnaire, as returned by 268 respondents. These 268 respondents had completed senior secondary school education and had sat for at least one exit CE. At the time of data collection, they were attending examination Tutorial classes in preparation for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), which is the entrance examination for Nigeria's higher education institutions. The HSEEAQ has 25 items that were grouped under four sections. Section 1 had 5 items that sought `for basic information for profiling the characteristics of the respondents. Section 2 had 5 items that sought information about the educational and career aspirations of the respondents. Section 3 had 10 Likert scale items, which investigated the views that the respondents held about the exit CE and the ways that it affected those who write them. Section 4 contained 5 vignettes that were developed from the lived experiences of the exit CE and were used to identify the ways that the respondents hypothetically preferred to negotiate exit CEs dilemmas. The HSEEAQ was used to collect data that addressed research question 1 through its sub-questions which states:

RQ1: What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs)?

a) What views do secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education hold concerning the exit CEs and their potential consequences?

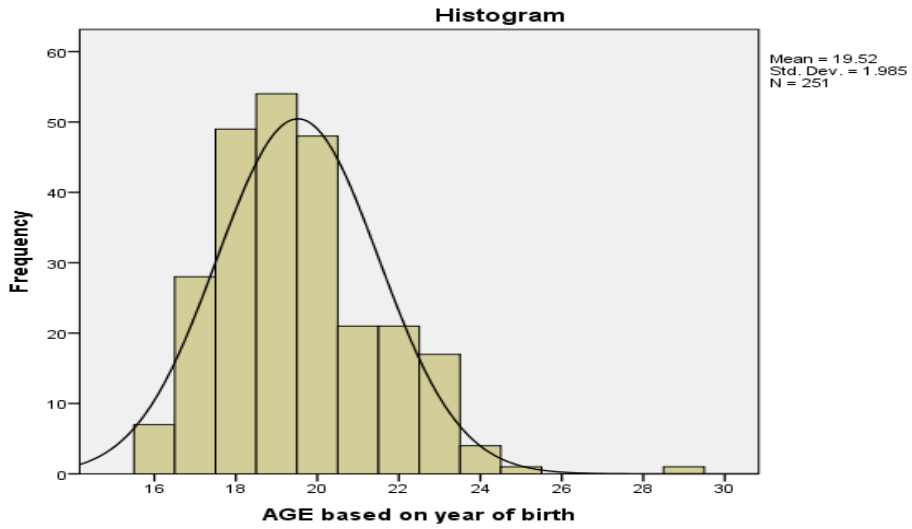
b) What are the hypothetical options of secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, when confronted with hypothetical exit CEs outcomes?

The findings in this chapter are presented in chronological order as reflected in the HSEEAQ and in response to the sub-questions for RQ1. The chapter ends with a discussion that integrates the findings to address RQ1 holistically.

5.2 HSEEAQ SECTION 1: RESPONDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Item 1 asked respondents for their date of birth. Their responses show that the youngest respondents were aged 16 while the oldest respondents were aged 25 (1 respondent) and 29 (1 respondent). 15 respondents did not indicate their age. Modal age was 19 years, and this accounted for 21.5% of those who disclosed their age. The mean age was 19.5 years with a standard deviation of approximately 2. The age distribution is positively skewed, with more of the respondents clustered towards the younger age bracket as illustrated in Figure 14 below.

Figure 14 Age distribution of HSEEAQ Respondents



Age Distribution of Respondents		
AGE	**Frequency**	**%**
16	7	2.8
17	28	11.2
18	49	19.5
19	54	21.5
20	48	19.1
21	21	8.4
22	21	8.4
23	17	6.8
24	4	1.6
25	1	0.4
29	1	0.4
Total	**251**	**100.0**

Item 2 asked respondents to indicate if they were either male or female. The omission of any other possibilities for gender was deliberate because the Nigerian cultural context is yet to recognise and accept these possibilities. The UK Home Office (2019) Country Policy and Information Note on Nigeria note that:

> *In general, persons who openly express their sexual orientation and/or gender identity are likely to face discrimination and ill-treatment from state actors and/or societal actors that by its nature and repetition amounts to persecution (p. 8)*

This was why the HSEEAQ did not include the option for other gendered identities. Amongst the 268 respondents, 41.8 % were males, 55.6% were females while 2.6% of them did not respond to the item about gender.

Item 3 asked respondents the year that they completed secondary school. The responses reveal that the year of completing secondary school ranged from 2008 – 2016, although 5 respondents did not indicate their year of completion. Only 39.5% of them completed secondary school in 2016, which was the immediate year prior to this study's data collection activities. At the time of administering the questionnaire, the 2017 examinations were just commencing. This has implications for the aspiration to go onto higher education. All other factors remaining constant, students who aspire to higher education should typically write the entrance examination for higher education (UTME) in the year after completing secondary school, although some write the UTME in the same year that they complete secondary school. The responses show that 29.7% of the respondents were preparing to write the UTME two years after completing secondary school, while 13.3% of the respondents were preparing to write the UTME three years after completing secondary school. This raises questions about the reasons why some secondary school leavers who aspire to higher education are NOT realising their aspirations in the immediate year after leaving secondary school. Table 5 below summarises the respondents' completion years. This table shows that there are secondary school leavers who are aspiring to higher education, after 5 (14 respondents), 6 (2 respondents), 7 (1 respondent) and 8 (1 respondent) years of completing secondary school.

Table 5 Year of Completing Secondary school

Year of Completion	No of Students	%
2016	104	39.5
2015	78	29.7
2014	35	13.3
2013	28	10.6
2012	14	5.3
2011	2	0.8
2010	1	0.4
2008	1	0.4
TOTAL	**263**	**100**

According to Nigeria's policy on education, an average student would complete secondary school at the age of 18 (FGN, 2013). It is however not uncommon to see students leaving secondary school before the age of 18 because they started formal schooling much earlier. The minimum age that is acceptable for entry into Nigeria's higher education institutions is 16 (JAMB, 2017a). To estimate the age of respondents at the time they completed secondary school, a crosstabulation of the responses to items 1 and 3 was done. The result is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Association between Age and SS3/CE Year of Completion

		SSS3/CE Year of completion								Total
		2008	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
AGE based on year of birth	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
	17	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	23	28
	18	0	0	0	0	0	2	11	36	49
	19	0	0	0	0	3	8	22	21	54
	20	0	0	0	2	5	8	20	11	46
	21	0	0	0	1	2	10	7	0	20
	22	0	0	0	4	8	4	4	1	21
	23	0	0	1	6	6	2	2	0	17
	24	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4
	25	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	29	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total		1	1	2	13	26	35	71	98	247

A close examination of this table shows that there are at least 17 respondents who completed secondary school at the age of 15 when you subtract their age when they completed secondary school from their age in the year 2017 when this data was collected. The boxes that are highlighted blue, yellow and green indicate those who completed secondary school at about the time when they were 15, 16 and 17 years respectively.

Item 4 asked respondents to choose from 5 options the kind of activities that they occupied most of their time with, and another option (other) that allowed respondents to indicate other activities. Besides attending the examination tutorial classes, the respondents were acquiring different kinds of vocational skills, participating in domestic /communal chores or engaging in leisurely activities. Table 7 below highlights some of the activities that young people in the Nigerian context were engaged in, outside the pursuits of higher education.

Table 7: Secondary School leavers' activities outside higher education pursuits

SKILL ACQUISITIONS		DOMESTIC / COMMUNITY CHORES	LEISURE
Bag making	Making Gele (African Headscarf/tie)	Working	Football /Sport
cosmetology	Hairdressing	Staying at Mum's shop	Composing / Listening to music
Baking	interior decoration	Doing Chores	singing
Bead making	Make-up artist	Cooking	reading
Catering	Fashion designing	Washing	Browsing online
Cloth sewing / tailoring	Nylon making & bundling	Reaching out to teens and youth	Chatting with phone
Computer literacy	Painting / graphic design		Playing game
Computer Programming	Phone repair		Sleeping
Computer Engineering	Photography / event coverage		Watching TV/Movies
Digital marketing			

Thus, while they still hold and pursue their aspirations to go onto higher education, many young people exercise their agency to get involved in activities that had the potential to be economically beneficial with or without higher education, while some just got a job.

Item 5 asked respondents to indicate the exit CE subjects that they obtained A1, B2/B3, D, E or F grades in. The rationale for this item was to have a general idea of the achievement profile of the respondents in the exit CE. Unfortunately, this item had to be discarded because many respondents did not complete this item. Their reasons were that they could not recall the actual grades they obtained in the exit CE subjects. This is understandable when the time frame that these exams were written is put into consideration. However, there was the possibility that the respondents were unwilling to recall or express any poor achievement outcomes in the HSEEAQ to 'save face' (that is, their dignity). This wanting to 'save face' was expressed in the response to the vignette items and will be discussed later. Unfortunately, the inability or unwillingness to respond to item 5 was not envisaged or encountered during the pilot of the HSEEAQ by the researcher.

5.3 HSEEAQ SECTION 2: EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Item 6 requested participants to choose the type of higher education institutions that appealed to them most. Although four persons did not respond to this item, 98.1% of those who did, selected the University. This finding supports JAMB (2018) observation in Chapter 3 that there were students who would not seek or accept admission offers into any higher education institution (HEI) that is not a university. This is likely connected to how the earnings of university graduates are higher than the earnings of graduates from other HEIs as Okuwa (2004) found in his study mentioned in chapter 3. Another likely reason is the discrimination against the qualifications awarded to graduates of other HEIs during employments as Gbonegun (2018) highlighted in chapter 3.

Item 7 asked respondents to choose from specified options or specify other reasons for why they were not yet in higher education. 45.5% of the 253 respondents who responded to the item alluded to their inability to obtain the required cut-off marks in the entrance examinations for HEIs. These entrance examinations (UTME, post-UTME etc), which are another set of High-stakes examinations that young people aspiring to higher education in Nigeria must successfully negotiate, continue to be a stumbling block for many. In chapter 3,

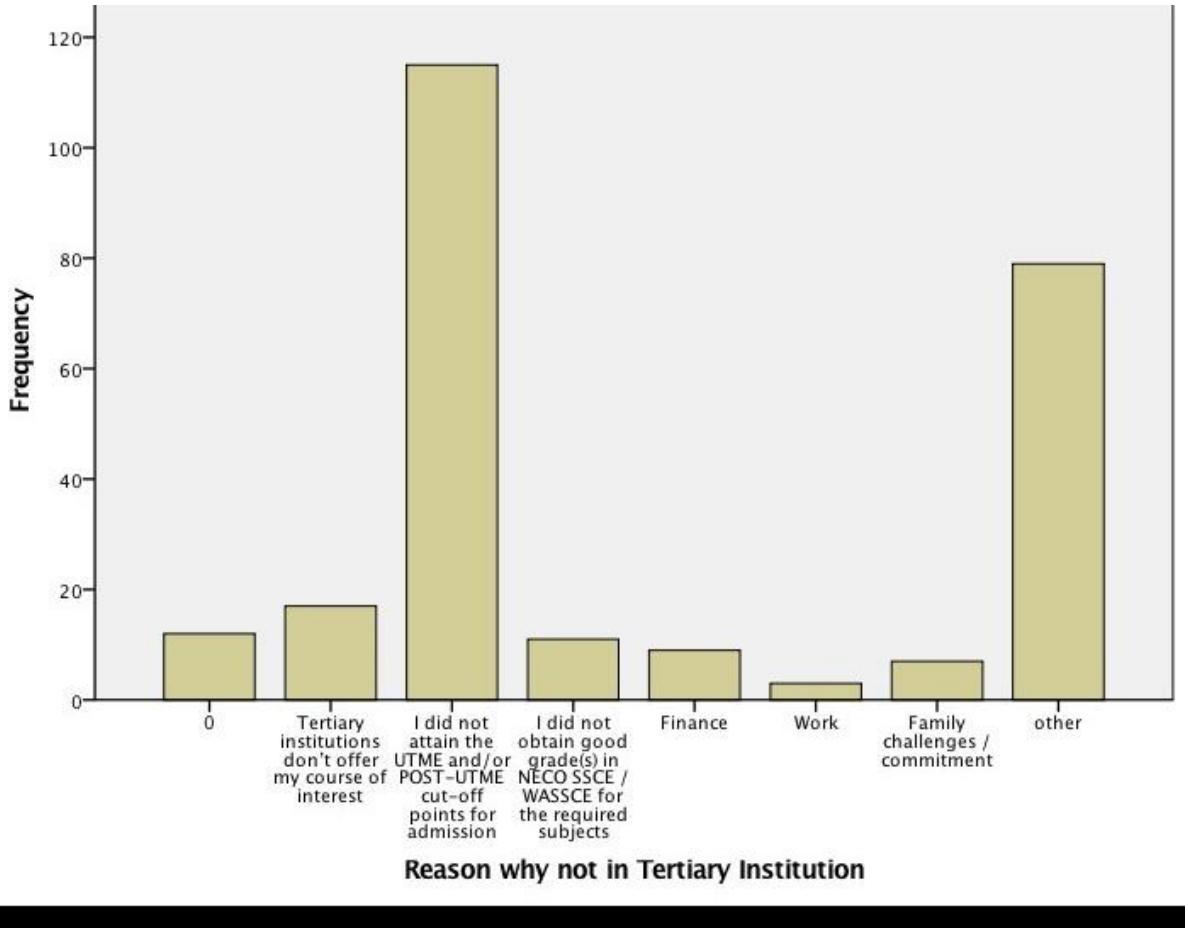
some of the characteristics of these entrance examinations that makes it difficult for many to successfully negotiate them include high Cut Off Marks (COM) that is triggered by insufficient spaces for qualified students, the Quota system that prioritises candidates from some States over candidates that merit it and the unwillingness of candidates to settle for HEIs that is not a university. Then, 6.7% of the 253 respondents selected the option that the HEIs did not offer the course they wanted. Only 4.3% of the respondents selected their inability to obtain the required grades in the exit CE as their reason. A probable reason for this is because at this point, the respondents were already preparing for the entrance exam into HEIs and many young people will only do this after they have successfully negotiated the exit CEs. Some options like finance, family challenges/commitment and work had few responses, while no one selected options like marriage, disability and ill health/sickness. This is probably connected to the characteristics of the sample that took part in this study because being able to attend a tutorial centre connotes a level of advantage in resources (money, time, people) These responses are summarised in Table 8 and illustrated graphically in figure 15 below.

Table 8: Reasons why not in Tertiary[7] Institutions

Reasons	Frequency	%
0 (selected more than one reason)	12	4.7
Tertiary institutions don't offer my course of interest	17	6.7
I did not attain the UTME and/or POST-UTME cut-off points for admission	115	45.5
I did not obtain good grade(s) in NECO SSCE / WASSCE for the required subjects	11	4.3
Finance	9	3.6
Work	3	1.2
Family challenges / commitment	7	2.8
other	79	31.2
Total	253	100.0

[7] Tertiary institution was used synonymously to mean the same as Higher education institution (HEI)

Figure 15: Reason why not in Higher Education



As can be seen above, there were 31.2% of the 253 respondents who selected and clarified the 'other' reason for not being in an HEI yet. When their 'other' reasons were categorised, the main reason given was of them being denied admission despite meeting the admission requirements. This category of secondary school leavers attributed the cause of their inability to get admission into HEIs to perceived shortcomings, failings or fraud in the admission process. Some of their statements are as follows:

I had good grades and reached the cut-off point, but I was not admitted (S1)

They didn't offer me admission; I merited it (S2)

Attained cut off mark but wasn't given admission (S3)

These claims raise concerns about the transparency of the admission process into Nigeria's HEIs. For instance, some of the respondents alluded that the admission process into HEIs was influenced by favouritism, nepotism, corruption and bribery, and these biased and frustrated their effort to get admitted. Some of the reasons and experiences are as follows:

> *My JAMB score was 211 but they did not give me admission. They expected me to pay in money. My friend got admission last year, but the family has to pay in money for her to get the course she wants. (S4)*
>
> *I was told to pay bribe. (S5)*
>
> *Lack of connection, that is, I don't know anyone in my choice of school. (S6)*

This allusion to malpractices in the admission process of HEIs raises concerns about the integrity of the HEIs, credibility of JAMB and its processes as well as the sincerity of the government to improving HE access and addressing inequalities in the education system. Analysing Nigeria's education system for the World Bank, Moja (2000) notes that "*Competition for access to limited places has led to practices such as cheating in examinations, bribery for admission, and manipulation of examination scores*" (p. 31). However, Nigerian literature is silent about these allusions and allegations. For some other students, it was their first attempt of seeking admission into HEIs, while for others it was due to personal circumstances such as "*family problem"* and being "*underaged (15 years*)" because the age of admittance is 16 years and above. Table 9 below summarises these 'other' reasons.

Table 9: Other Reasons why not in HEI

S/N	OTHER REASONS	Frequency	%
1	"Attained cut off mark but wasn't given	31	12.3
2	First attempt at seeking admission	20	7.9
3	Malpractices / corruption in admission	14	5.5
4	Personal circumstances or choice	7	2.8
5	Did not Specify	7	2.8
	TOTAL	**253**	**100**

Item 8 sought to know the highest level of education that respondents aspired to before they clocked 30 years. 94% of the respondents aspired to a form of postgraduate study as their highest level of education. ***Item 9*** asked about the respondents' career aspirations before they turned 30, while ***item 10*** asked about the course that they would need to study in HEIs to realise their career aspirations. About 80% of the respondents mentioned career aspirations that required higher education qualifications for them to be realised. In addition, they displayed an awareness of at least one higher education pathway that can be navigated towards realising these career aspirations.

5.4 HSEEAQ SECTION 3: VIEWS OF THE EXIT CE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

What views do secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education hold concerning the exit CEs and their potential consequences?

In this section, the views of secondary school leavers with regards to the exit CE and the kind of effects that it is perceived to have on those who take the examination are discussed. Findings for this section is sourced from the responses to items 11 – 20 on the questionnaire. In table 10 below, the responses are reported with frequencies and percentages.

Table 10: Views of the exit CE and its perceived consequences

Items	STATEMENTS	Frequency	Disagree	Agree nor Disagree	Agree	TOTAL
11	Certificate Examinations does not accurately reflect what students were taught in secondary school.	N	132	39	90	261
		% of Total	50.6%	14.9%	34.5%	100%
12	Certificate Examinations discourage some students from completing secondary school.	N	163	30	70	263
		% of Total	62%	11.4%	26.6%	100%
13	Certificate Examinations does not pressure students to engage in examination malpractices.	N	141	53	64	258
		% of Total	54.7%	20.5%	24.8%	100%
14	Certificate Examinations cause anxiety and stress for students.	N	60	32	162	254
		% of Total	23.6%	12.6%	63.8 %	100%
15	Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can change someone's educational plan.	N	21	16	228	265
		% of Total	7.9%	6.0%	86.0 %	100%
16	Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in future careers.	N	71	28	158	257
		% of Total	27.6%	10.9%	61.5%	100%
17	Poor performance in Certificate Examinations is a sign of a student's poor academic performance while in secondary school.	N	104	57	103	264
		% of Total	39.4%	29.6%	39.0%	100%
18	Students' good grades in Certificate Examinations strongly show that a school has good, quality teachers.	N	81	63	121	265
		% of Total	30.6%	23.8%	45.7%	100%
19	Getting good grades in Certificate Examinations is the MAIN reason why we attend secondary school.	N	120	42	101	263
		% of Total	45.6%	16.0%	38.4%	100%
20	It is easier to get good grades in the NECO SSCE than it is in the WASSCE.	N	114	74	77	265
		% of Total	43.0%	27.9%	29.1%	100%

Item 11

When the respondents were asked whether they thought '*Certificate Examinations does not accurately reflect what students were taught in secondary school*' in **item 11**; 50.6% of 261 respondents disagreed with the statement, as against 34.5% who agreed with the statement and 14.9% who did not identify with both viewpoints. This meant that more respondents were of the view that the exit CEs accurately reflected what students were taught in secondary school. One way to look at this is the teaching-to-the-test that has been identified in the literature as a consequence of High-stakes testing. In Chapter 3, reference was made to the Bosan (2018) study which found that mathematics teachers in Kaduna state, Nigeria used past examination questions of the exit CEs to guide what they taught and how they taught. When

the High-stakes examination determines what is being taught in the classroom, then the exit CE would be an accurate reflection of what is taught in the classroom.

Examining the association between this item and gender, Table 11 below shows the breakdown of responses to item 11 by gender.

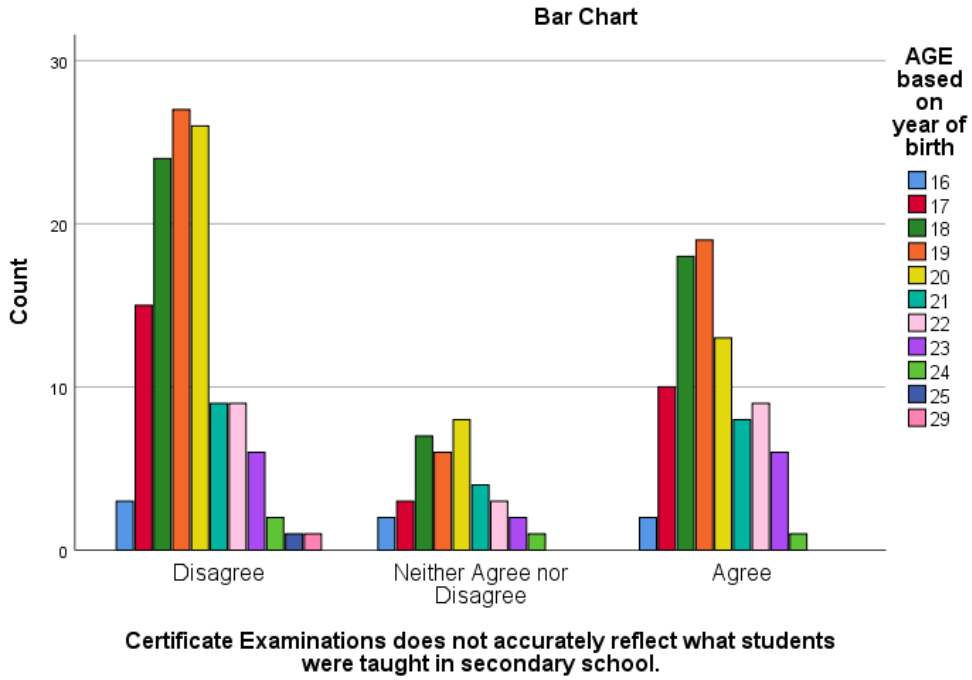
Table 11: Association between Item 11 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Certificate Examinations does not accurately reflect what students were taught in secondary school.	Disagree	N	49	80	129
		% within Gender	44.5%	55.6%	50.8%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	17	21	38
		% within Gender	15.5%	14.6%	15.0%
	Agree	N	44	43	87
		% within Gender	40.0%	29.9%	34.3%
Total	N		110	144	254
	% within Gender		100%	100%	100%

From Table 11 above, it can be observed that while both males (44.5%) and females (55.6%) tended to disagree with the view that "*Certificate Examinations does not accurately reflect what students were taught in secondary school*", the males (40.0%) were more likely to agree with the view than their female counterparts (29.9%). Using a chi-square test χ^2 (2, N = 254) = 3.39, p = .18, the p-value, however, indicates that the views that are held about the exit CEs based on responses to item 11 did not significantly vary by gender.

Furthermore, when the chi-square test was used to assess the relationship between the views expressed in item 11 and the age of the respondents - χ^2 (20, N = 254) = 6.99, p = .99, the p-value shows that both variables are independent of each other as there is no statistically significant relationship between them. The pattern of responses to item 11 by Age based on year of birth is presented in figure 16 below.

Figure 16: Association between Item 11 and Age



Item 12

62% of 263 respondents disagreed with the statement that '*Certificate examinations discourage some students from completing secondary school*' of **item 12**, while 26.6% were of the contrary opinion, although 11.4% neither agreed nor disagreed. This implies that a higher number of respondents do not think that the exit CEs discourage students from completing secondary school. Thus, the CEs is not viewed as a likely reason for students dropping out of secondary school by many secondary school leavers in the Nigerian context. This view is supported by Jacob (2001) who found that the graduation tests for high school students in the US had no significant effect on the probability of dropping out for the average student, although the probability is higher for low ability students when he used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS). This is however contradicted by findings from the Catterall (1989) study, were just above 50% of 736 students in the United States supported the view that the "*tests required for graduation may discourage some students from staying in high school*" (p. 11). This study also found that it was the low-achievers that mainly held this view.

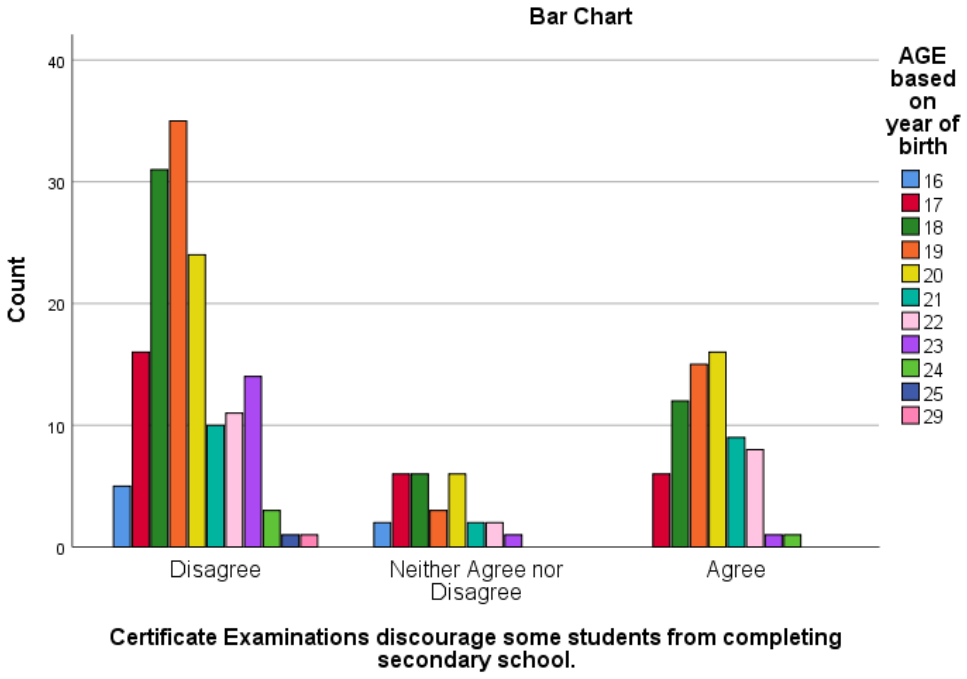
Exploring the relationship between the responses to item 12 and the gender of the respondents using a chi-square test, the p-value indicates that the views that are held about whether "*Certificate Examinations discourage some students from completing secondary school*" were slightly dependent on the gender of the respondents, χ^2 (2, N = 256) = 6.06, p = .04. Table 12 below shows the pattern of responses to item 12 by gender.

Table 12: Association between Item 12 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Certificate Examinations discourage some students from completing secondary school.	Disagree	N	59	99	158
		% within Gender	53.6%	67.8%	61.7%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	17	12	29
		% within Gender	15.5%	8.2%	11.3%
	Agree	N	34	35	69
		% within Gender	30.9%	24.0%	27.0%
Total		N	110	146	256
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

On the other hand, the views that were expressed in item 12 was independent of the age of the respondents, when both variables were associated with each other using a chi-square test, χ^2 (2, N = 256) = 20.74, p = .41. Figure 17 shows the pattern of response to item 12 by age.

Figure 17: Association between Item 12 and Age



Item 13

54.7% of the 258 respondents to **item 13** disagreed with the statement - '*Certificate Examinations does **not** pressure some students to engage in examination malpractices'* as against 24.8% of the respondents who agreed. However, 20.5% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Thus, we see that more respondents were of the view that the exit CEs pressured some students to engage in examination malpractices. This supports the findings in both international and Nigerian literature as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. In Kenya, Kagete (2008) found that the competitiveness in the education system engendered examination malpractices amongst students. Makaula (2018) found a similar impact of High-stakes testing on students in Malawi.

When a chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between gender and the responses to item 13, it was found that the association between both variables was not significant, χ^2 (2, N = 251) = 2.00, p = .36. Therefore, both males and females responses to "Certificate Examinations does not pressure students to engage in examination malpractices" were not statistically different. Table 13 below shows the pattern of responses to item 13 by gender.

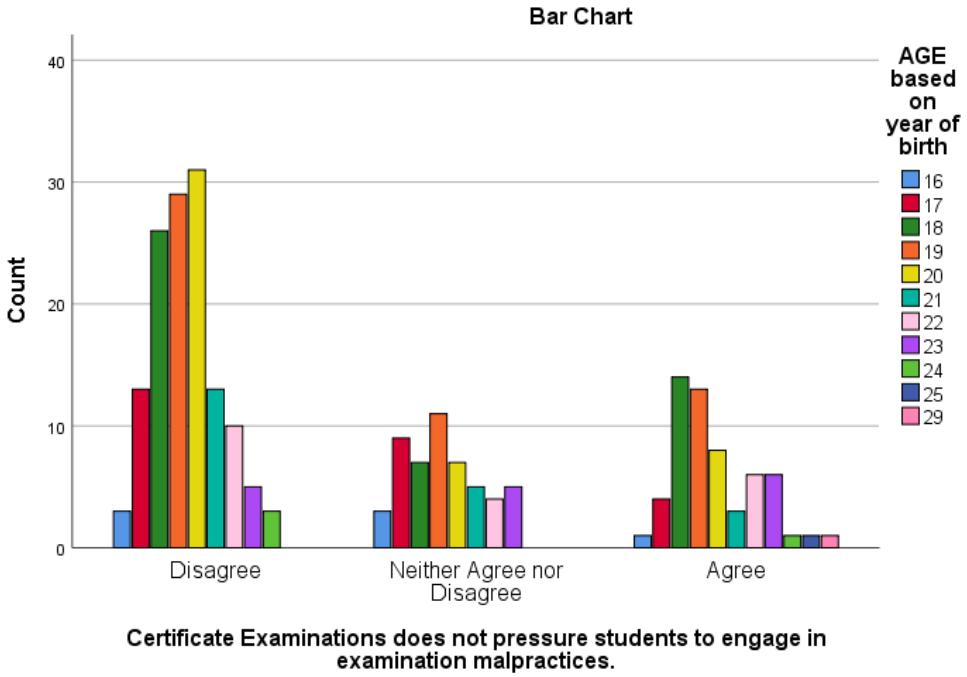
Table 13: Association between item 13 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Certificate Examinations does not pressure students to engage in examination malpractices.	Disagree	N	60	77	137
		% within Gender	56.1%	53.5%	54.6%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	25	27	52
		% within Gender	23.4%	18.8%	20.7%
	Agree	N	22	40	62
		% within Gender	20.6%	27.8%	24.7%
Total		N	107	144	251
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When another chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between the age of the respondents and the responses to item 13, it was also found that the association between both variables was not significant, χ^2 (20, N = 251) = 22.22, p = .32. Therefore, the responses to "*Certificate Examinations does not pressure students to engage in examination*

malpractices" were not statistically different by age. Figure 18 below illustrates the pattern of responses to item 13 by age.

Figure 18: Association between Item 13 and Age



Item 14

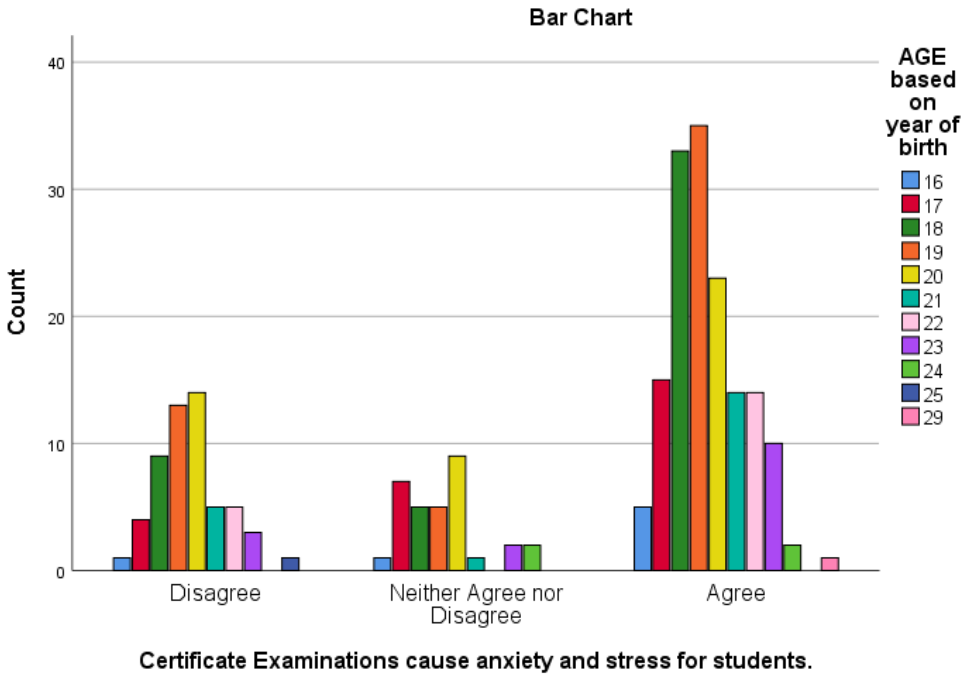
63.8% of the 254 respondents to **item 14** agreed with the statement that '*Certificate Examinations cause anxiety and stress for students'* as against 23.6% who disagreed and 12.6% who neither agreed nor disagreed. That is, more respondents were of the view that the exit CEs engendered anxiety and stress for students. This view agrees with several studies which have found that school examinations are a significant source of stress for young people e.g. Kouzma & Kennedy (2004) and Putwain (2009). However, using a chi-square test, no significant relationship was found between the responses to this item and gender, χ^2 (2, N = 247) = 1.74, p = .41. The pattern of responses to item 14 by gender is displayed in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Association between Item 14 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Certificate Examinations cause anxiety and stress for students.	Disagree	N	20	37	57
		% within Gender	19.0%	26.1%	23.1%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	15	17	32
		% within Gender	14.3%	12.0%	13.0%
	Agree	N	70	88	158
		% within Gender	66.7%	62.0%	64.0%
Total		N	105	142	247
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between the views that were expressed about "Certificate Examinations cause anxiety and stress for students " and the age of the respondents, when a chi-square test was used to examine this relationship, χ^2 (20, N = 247) = 23.21, p = .27. The breakdown of responses to this item by age is displayed in figure 19 below.

Figure 19: Association between Item 14 and Age



Item 15

86% of 265 respondents agreed with the statement that '*Poor performance in Certificate examinations changes some students' educational plan*' as against a low number of respondents (7.9%) who disagreed with the statement, and 6% who neither agreed nor disagreed. Thus, most of the respondents agree that one's educational plan can be altered by experiencing poor achievement outcomes in exit CEs. This is a view that also featured strongly in the pattern of responses by the secondary school leavers to vignette items 21 to 25, and in the qualitative accounts of the lived experiences of the exit CE. Coincidentally, 86% of 265 is the highest frequency of response to any of the ten items in this section. This response is important to this study because of how it links to the research aim. This view will, therefore, be further explored under section 5.5, where it emerged as a hypothetical solution to exit CE dilemmas and in chapter 6 where it emerged as an unintended consequence of the exit CE.

Meanwhile, a chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between gender and the views that the respondents held about item 15. It was found that the views expressed in response to item 15 were statistically independent of whether one was male or female, χ^2 (2, N = 258) = 0.06, p = .97. Table 15 below provides a summary of the responses to this item by gender.

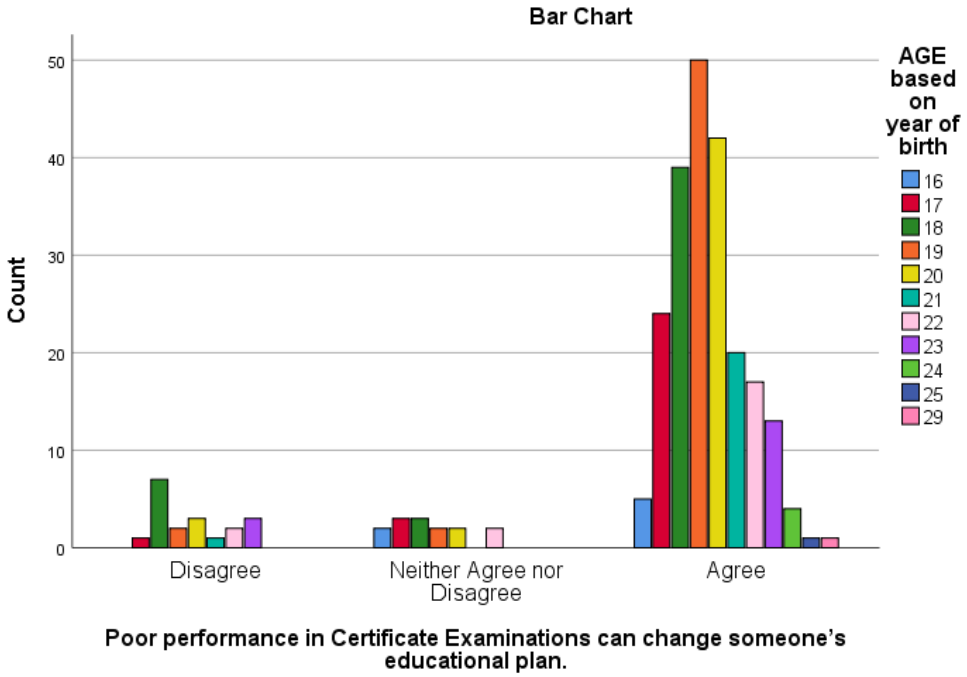
Table 15: Association between Item 15 and gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can change someone's educational plan.	Disagree	N	9	11	20
		% within Gender	8.2%	7.4%	7.8%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	7	9	16
		% within Gender	6.4%	6.1%	6.2%
	Agree	N	94	128	222
		% within Gender	85.5%	86.5%	86.0%
Total		N	110	148	258
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Similarly, the responses to this item did not differ by age, χ^2 (20, N = 258) = 21.07, p = .39. Therefore, the views that the respondents held about "*Poor performance in Certificate*

examinations changes some students' educational plan" had no significant relationship with both gender and age. The pattern of responses to item 15 by Age is summarised in figure 20 below.

Figure 20: Association between Item 15 and Age



Item 16

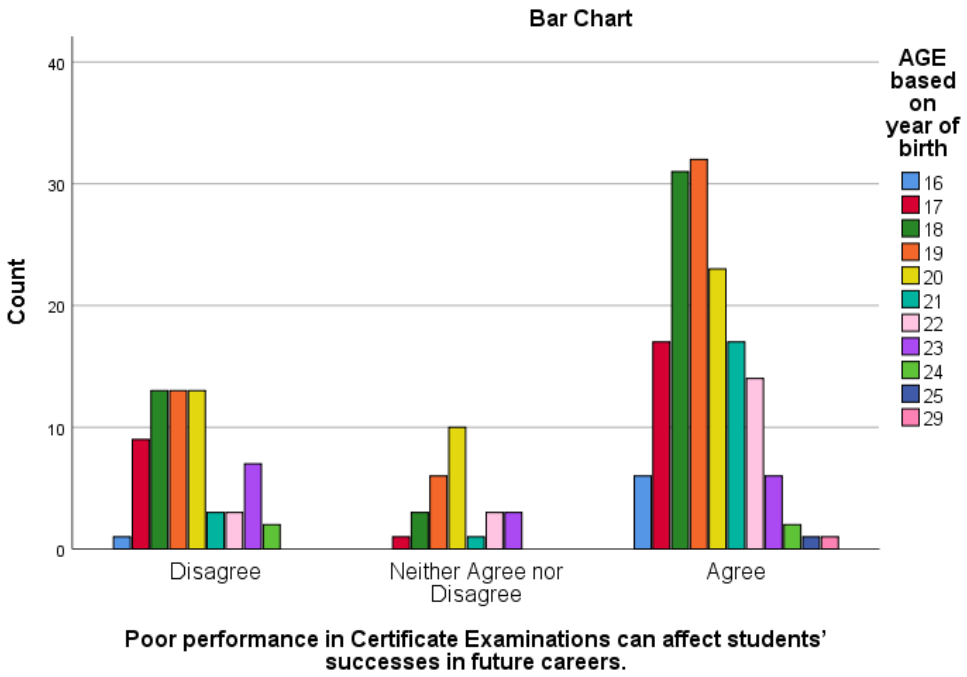
For **item 16**, 61.5% of 257 respondents agreed that '*Poor performance in Certificate Examinations affect some students' successes in future careers'* as against 27.6% who disagreed and 10.9% who neither agreed nor disagreed. Thus, more respondents were of the view that poor academic performance in the Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in their future careers. Using a chi-square test to examine how the responses to this item associated with gender, no significant relationship was found between both variables, χ^2 (2, N = 250) = 1.49, p = .47. Table 16 summarises the responses to item 16 by gender.

Table 16: Association between Item 16 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in future careers.	Disagree	N	31	38	69
		% within Gender	28.4%	27.0%	27.6%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	14	12	26
		% within Gender	12.8%	8.5%	10.4%
	Agree	N	64	91	155
		% within Gender	58.7%	64.5%	62.0%
Total		N	109	141	250
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In addition, a chi-square test also showed that the responses to this item were statistically independent of the age of the respondents, χ^2 (20, *N* = 250) = 21.84, *p* = .34. Thus, the views that were expressed in relation to "*Poor performance in Certificate Examinations affect some students' successes in future careers"* did not statistically differ by gender or age. Figure 21 below provides a pictorial representation of the responses to this item by age.

Figure 21: Association between item 16 and Age



Because of the similarities between item 15 and item 16, in relation to how experiencing poor outcomes in the exit CEs had the potential to affect young people's future lives, a chi-square test was used to examine the statistical relationship between both items. The association, as illustrated in table 17 below shows that the view that is linked to the highest frequency of respondents agreed to both Items 15 and 16. That is, 57.2% (147 out of 257 respondents) were of the view that poor performance in the exit CEs can alter educational plans as well as affect success in future careers. A chi-square test showed that this association between both items is statistically significant, χ^2 (4, N = 257) = 18.78, p = .00. This highlights the high stakes that many secondary school leavers associate with the exit CE.

Table 17: Association between Item 16 and Item 15

			Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in future careers.			
			Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Total
Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can change someone's educational plan.	Disagree	N	9	5	7	21
		% of Total	3.5%	1.9%	2.7%	8.2%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	9	2	4	15
		% of Total	3.5%	0.8%	1.6%	5.8%
	Agree	N	53	21	**147**	221
		% of Total	20.6%	8.2%	57.2%	86.0%
Total		N	71	28	158	257
		% of Total	27.6%	10.9%	61.5%	100.0%

Item 17

For **item 17**, nearly equal number of the 264 respondents expressed either agreement (39%) or disagreement (39.4%) with the statement that '*Poor performance in Certificate Examinations is a sign of a student's poor academic performance while in secondary school*'. However, 21.6% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Thus, there is little or no contrast between those who think that poor performance in the CEs is indicative of prior academic achievement in secondary school and those who don't. The implication of this is that there is no consensus on how performance in the exit CEs mirrors

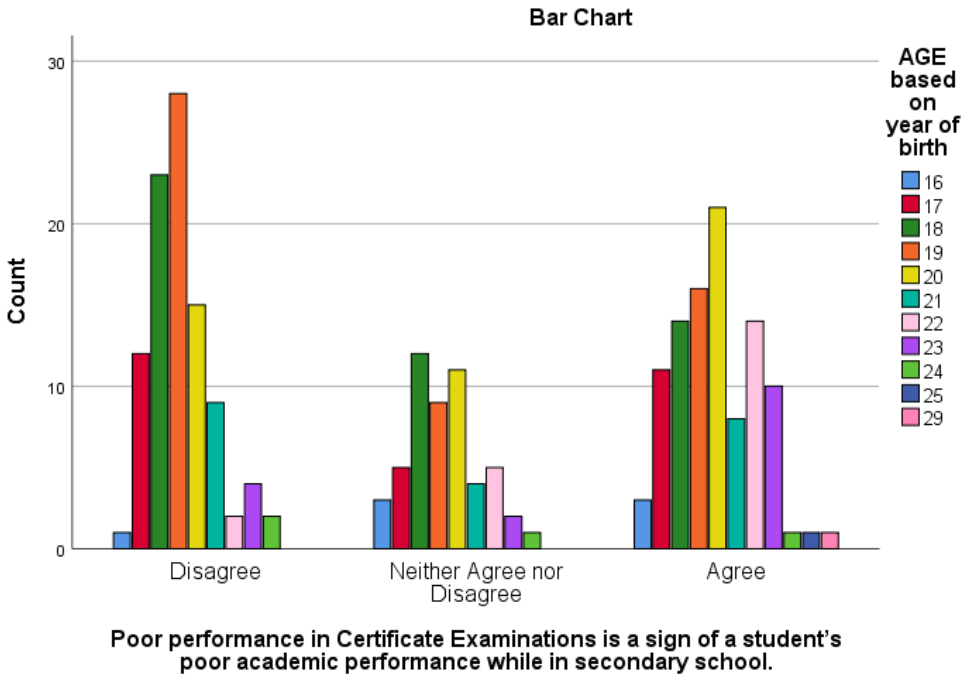
performance before the exit CEs amongst the sample of secondary school leavers who took part in this study. Using a chi-square test, no association was found between gender and the views that are held about item 17, χ^2 (2, N = 257) = 2.23, p = .32. Table 18 below shows the pattern of responses to item 17 by gender.

Table 18: Association between item 17 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Poor performance in Certificate Examinations is a sign of a student's poor academic performance while in secondary school.	Disagree	N	38	64	102
		% within Gender	34.5%	43.5%	39.7%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	27	29	56
		% within Gender	24.5%	19.7%	21.8%
	Agree	N	45	54	99
		% within Gender	40.9%	36.7%	38.5%
Total		N	110	147	257
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Furthermore, no association was found between age and the responses to item 17, χ^2 (20, N = 257) = 26.27, p = .15. Figure 22 below illustrates the pattern of response to this item by age.

Figure 22: Association between Item 17 and Age



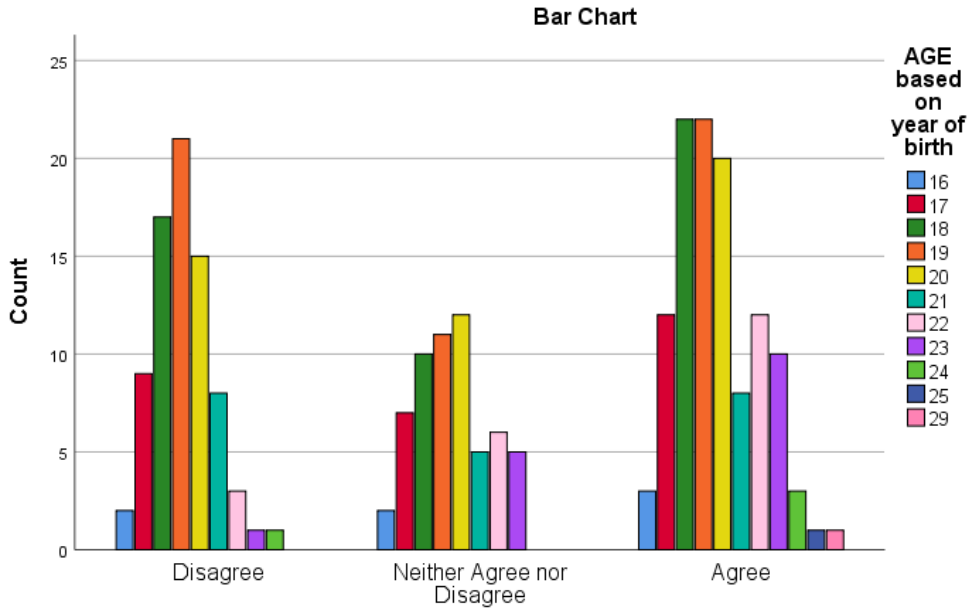
Item 18

45.7% of the 265 respondents agreed that '*students' good grades in Certificate Examinations strongly show that a school has good, quality teachers*' as against 30.6% who disagreed and 23.8% who were neutral. Thus, more respondents tended to agree that good academic achievement in the exit CEs is indicative of the presence of good and quality teachers. Using a chi-square test, it was found that the views that are held about this item neither differed by gender, χ^2 (2, N = 258) = 1.92, p = .38 nor by age χ^2 (20, N = 258) = 14.44, p = .80. Table 19 provides a breakdown of the responses to item 18 by Gender while Figure 23 afterwards displays the pattern of responses to item 18 by Age.

Table 19: Association between Item 18 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Students' good grades in Certificate Examinations strongly show that a school has good, quality teachers.	Disagree	N	33	46	79
		% within Gender	30.0%	31.1%	30.6%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	31	31	62
		% within Gender	28.2%	20.9%	24.0%
	Agree	N	46	71	117
		% within Gender	41.8%	48.0%	45.3%
Total		N	110	148	258
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 23: Association between Item 18 and Age



Item 19

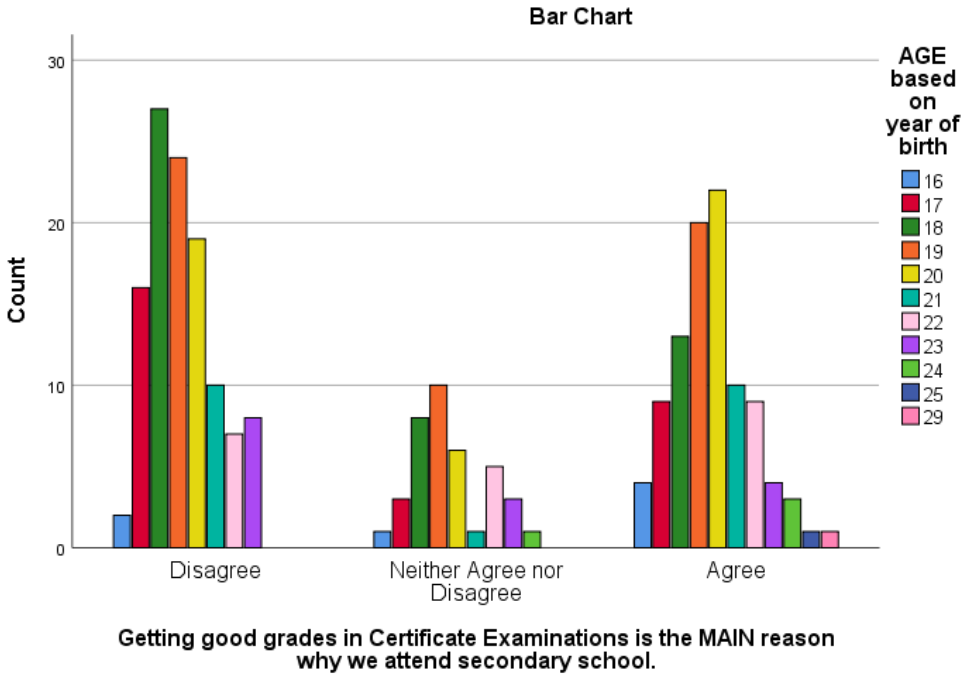
Of the 263 respondents to **item 19**, 45.6% disagreed with the statement that '*Getting good grades in Certificate Examinations is the MAIN reason why we attend secondary school*', as against 38.4% who agreed and 16% who were undecided. This suggests that the prevailing attitude was that obtaining good grades wasn't a priority for why they attended secondary school. Using a chi-square test to examine whether these views are associated with the gender of the respondents, the p-value indicates that both variables are independent of each other as there is no statistically significant relationship between them, $\chi 2$ (2, N = 256) = 3.82, p = .14. The pattern of responses to item 19 by gender is shown in Table 20 below

Table 20: Association between Item 19 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Getting good grades in Certificate Examinations is the MAIN reason why we attend secondary school.	Disagree	Count	42	75	117
		% within Gender	38.9%	50.7%	45.7%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Count	21	20	41
		% within Gender	19.4%	13.5%	16.0%
	Agree	Count	45	53	98
		% within Gender	41.7%	35.8%	38.3%
Total		Count	108	148	256
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Similarly, there was no statistically significant relationship between item 19 and the age of the respondents, $\chi 2$ (20, N = 256) = 18.43, p = .55. The pattern of responses to item 19 by gender is displayed in Figure 24 below.

Figure 24: Association between Item 19 and Age



Item 20

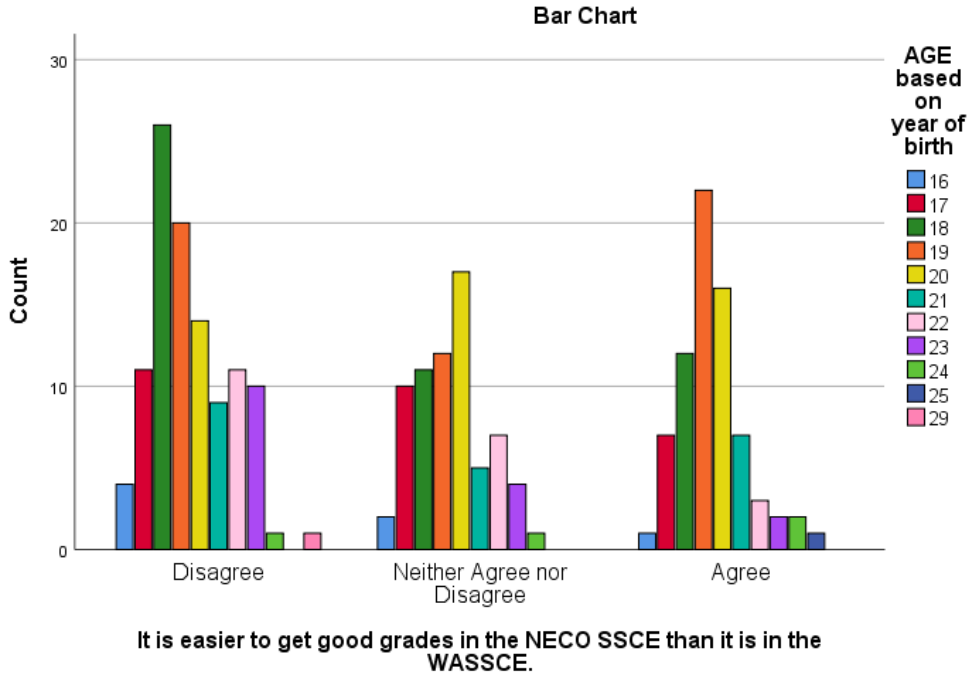
For **item 20,** a higher percentage (43%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that "*It is easier to get good grades in the NECO SSCE than it is in the WASSCE*", while 29.1% of the respondents agreed, although 27.9% were neutral. Thus, more of the respondents were of the view that it is easier to obtain good grades in the WASSCE, the older exam board than in the NECO SSCE, the newer exam board. Associating the responses to this item with the gender of the respondents using a chi-square test, the p-value shows that both variables are not associated to each other, $\chi 2$ (2, N = 258) = 1.98, p = .37. The responses to item 20 by gender is shown in Table 21 below.

Table 21: Association between Item 20 and Gender

	Views	Frequency	Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
It is easier to get good grades in the NECO SSCE than it is in the WASSCE.	Disagree	N	45	66	111
		% within Gender	40.9%	44.6%	43.0%
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	N	28	44	72
		% within Gender	25.5%	29.7%	27.9%
	Agree	N	37	38	75
		% within Gender	33.6%	25.7%	29.1%
Total		N	110	148	258
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Similarly, the responses to item 20 are not associated to the age of the respondents as indicated by the p-value from the chi-square test that was performed on them, $\chi 2$ (20, N = 258) = 20.88, p = .40. The responses to item 20 by age is pictorially represented in Figure 25 below.

Figure 25: Association between Item 20 and Age



5.5 HSEEAQ SECTION 4: HYPOTHETICAL SOLUTIONS TO EXIT CE DILEMMAS

What are the hypothetical options of secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, when confronted with hypothetical exit CEs outcomes?

The rationale for including vignettes in this questionnaire was to normalise the discussion of poor academic performance in High-stakes examinations, by offering the respondents a sense of detachment while depersonalising the unpleasant experiences. The use of these vignettes was very effective in eliciting engaging responses from the respondents. First, it piqued the interest of potential respondents to complete the vignette-based questionnaire. Stories have been found to easily stimulate the interest of young people (Sadi & Basit, 2017). Secondly, it allowed respondents to critically analyse potential options for realising the aspiration to go onto higher education. Thirdly, it stimulated the young people to draw upon their personal lived experience because there were instances where respondents used personal experiences to make or buttress a point. Finally, it allowed the respondents to express their opinion in their own words since the vignettes were open-ended items. Thematic analysis was used to identify the possible consequences of the exit CE, for young people aspiring to higher education who experience the vignette dilemmas and the underlying views that they hold about the exit CE. Descriptive statistics was however used to report the findings. In this section, the underlying assumption for using hypothetical preferences of the respondents as an indicator of their views is that the preferences of secondary school leavers regarding the vignette dilemmas are potentially the choices that they can make if they encounter such scenarios in real-life. There were five vignettes in the questionnaire numbered items 21 – 25, and they are discussed in that order in the next section.

5.5.1 First Time experience of unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CE

The objective of the first vignette (item 21) was to examine respondents' preferred hypothetical solutions when low achievement outcomes are experienced in the exit CEs for the first time, to identify the possible consequences of this dilemma on young people aspiring to higher education. The vignette item was:

Effiong wants to be a Mechanical Engineer. Because of this, he did apprenticeship with a Mechanic for some weeks during a school holiday. Last year, Effiong sat for both the WASSCE and NECO SSCE. Sadly, his NECO SSCE result was seized and in his WASSCE, he had F9 in Physics, E8 in Chemistry and D7 in Mathematics. To study Mechanical Engineering in the University, Effiong needs a minimum of C6 grade in these three subjects. Just before the examinations, Effiong started to learn how to play the Piano. Now, he is developing serious interest in Music and is thinking about pursuing a career in Music. He needs to decide on what to do with his future education. If you are Effiong, what would you decide about your future education and why?

The responses to this vignette are summarised in Table 12 below.

Table 22: Summary of responses to Item 21

S/N	RESPONSES	Rationale	Freq	%
1	Choose Music	Low aptitude for Mechanical Engineering	114	42.7
		Music is easier to achieve		
		Less time consuming		
		Optimistic economic returns		
2	Choose Mechanical Engineering	Intrinsic value	82	29.7
		Perpetual economic value		
3	Choose both Music and Mechanical Engineering		31	*11.6*
4	*Evaluate self and/or circumstances before deciding*		29	*10.9*
5	*Vague /Ambiguous/ uncertain /varied responses*		11	4.1
	Total		267	100

There were three main categories of responses to this item. The first category comprised 114 (42.7% of 267) respondents who indicated that they would choose to pursue Music as their new career interest, thus forgoing their aspiration to go onto higher education to study Mechanical engineering. For some respondent, the preferred choice to opt for a career in music instead of the initial higher education aspiration to do mechanical engineering was mainly motivated by a low expectation of success in a repeated exit CE attempt, which is

echoed by a belief that a career in Music was easier to achieve when compared to successfully navigating the educational requirements to pursue Mechanical engineering, as these respondents opined:

*I will continue with the music career because I will make it easier in music since I did not do well in my education. (*S7)

I think I will go for music since it's my desire and it's also a professional course. It's not stressful and you easily gain admission into the university. (S8)

For other respondents, the poor achievement outcomes in the exit CE core subjects for Mechanical engineering was an indicator of a lack of ability/aptitude to pursue higher education in that field. Thus, pursuing a career in Music was considered a better option. This is illustrated by this respondent's preferred solution to this dilemma:

*If I were Effiong, I will decide to pursue a career in music because for Effiong to get E8, D7 and F9 in the basic subjects he needs, it shows that Effiong is not technically inclined and so won't do well in the course. So, I think going for music will be better off. (*S9)

Then, there was a group of students whose rationale for choosing a Music career was to save time and avoid delay in their educational progress. These respondents explain it thus:

if getting 6 credits in order to study Engineering is difficult and music is now part of me, I will continue with my music life and decide to study further music so as to save time and switch course of study from being an Engineer to musician. (S10)

I will go for a musical career. Reason - time waits for nobody. If he continues waiting, it might be late at last. (S11)

For some respondents, the pursuit of higher education is a sheer waste of time. For instance, these respondents had these to say:

I will go on with my music career because going back to education future will be a waste of time. (S12)

In this world, education is not actually what people need. (S13)

For some respondents, a career in Music has more financial prospects than a career as a Mechanical engineer in Nigeria, as expressed by the respondents below:

> *if it were I, I will go for music. Reason is that… even music is now making money more than those that study engineering because they are self-employed. (S17)*
>
> *"I will earn more in Music than that Mechanical engineering".* (S18)
>
> *"I would pursue the music career and build more interest in it because it will take me places in this present situation of the economy."* (S19)

Thus, some respondents prefer to alter their higher education aspirations in some way when they encounter poor performance in the exit CE because the alternatives are more financially rewarding than following the route of higher education.

Finally, some of the respondents that chose music suggest that getting a higher education does not guarantee future success. These sentiments were expressed by statements like "*not all who go to school is successful or famous*" (S14) and "*education is actually not everyone's pathway to success*" (S15). Thus, although they aspired to higher education, they were pessimistic about the connection between education and future success. This could explain why some disagreed with item 16 which stated that '*Poor performance in Certificate Examinations affect some students' successes in future careers'.* This kind of sentiment is also engendered by an awareness that "*Nigeria doesn't have enough jobs" (S16)*. By the third quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate in Nigeria was 23.1% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018b). Thus, a future in a music career is considered a better option because of its potential for self-employment.

The second category of 82 respondents (29.7% of 267) comprised those who preferred to persist in pursuing their higher education aspiration to study Mechanical Engineering. This hypothetical preference is underpinned by an expectation of success because this preference requires that the respondent rewrite the exit CE or its alternatives, to obtain the required grades for HEIs admittance. Those in this category hold a strong belief that a successful future hinge on getting an education like these respondents who assert that "*education is the key in*

this twenty first century"(S20) and "*education in our modern world today is the key to success and without education, your life will be like a building without good foundation*" (S21). The rationale for this appears to be a belief that education opens more doors for employment opportunities as these respondents assert:

I would pursue my education first because it will give me better job opportunities. (S22)

"I would go for the mechanical engineering because it's a more profitable course. (S23)

This is supported by the views of some that a career in Music is a temporary source of income when compared to education, which has a seemingly more perpetual economic value/utility as expressed by these respondents:

…music has an age-limit, but education doesn't. (S24)

…music can lead to a certain extent in life, but education will lead you to any extent you want to attain in the future. (S25)

While there is a recognition of the negative feelings associated with having obtained poor achievement outcomes in the exit CEs, some are convinced that this does not suggest that one is incapable of meeting the requirements to achieve one's higher education aspirations. Hence, the justification to resit for the exit CE.

I will write another WASSCE or NECO so that I can be able to study my mechanical engineering. Having a bad result is not the end of the world. (S26)

I will go back and reseat for WASSCE because there is an adage that says failure is the key to success. (S27)

Aside from the willingness to invest time, a willingness to invest money is also involved in adopting this preference because of the cost implications of re-registering for another exit Certificate examination or its alternatives. The preference to rewriting the exit CE, despite the initial academic setback, also suggests an expectation of success in subsequent examinations. This respondent articulates this expectation well when s/he declared a determination to go forward, despite and beyond the feelings of failure:

I will try to rewrite my papers because that I fail today does not mean am a failure and make sure I made my papers this second time to further my education. (S28)

Somehow, these feelings of failure become a motivation to do better and achieve the initial higher education aspirations. These respondents illustrate how such feelings can become a motivation:

> *I decide what I want to become in life, not an examination or someone else. So if I want to become a mechanical engineer, one, two or three failures can't make me stop pursuing my dreams. I will learn from my mistakes and try to adjust in places of errors in how I study. (S29)*

> *I will maintain my mechanical engineer [preference]. My bad result will be a great challenge for me to study hard as never before and succeed than running to music. (S30)*

Thus, some respondents prefer to persist with realising their higher education aspirations when they encounter poor performance in the exit CE because of the intrinsic and economic value that they have attached to their aspirational wants.

Then, there was the category of 31 (11.2% of 276) respondents who would rather pursue their interest in Music while they were still working towards achieving their aspirations to do Mechanical engineering. For this group of people, the economic benefit of doing Music seemed to influence the decision to pursue both paths as these respondents suggest:

> *Music career is what can give me some funds and money to survive in my education. (*S31)

> *I might use the Music or piano skills to create residual income. (S32)*

> *I will use the income generated from [Music] to meet up to my educational need in the future. (S33)*

> *I can be doing Music part time because Nigeria doesn't have enough jobs. (S34)*

Thus, even when some respondents suggested that they would continue to focus on pursuing Mechanical engineering, Music remained a back-up for financial benefit. Although for some of them, the interest in Music was as a mere hobby or something done for fun; hence, the choice to maintain a futuristic interest in it. In conclusion, more than one-third of the respondents (42.7%) would rather alter their aspirations for higher education because the

alternative was easier to accomplish, more economically rewarding and less time-consuming. For those who preferred to persist with the initial aspiration for higher education (29.7%), the intrinsic and economic value of doing mechanical engineering was the motivation.

5.5.2 Unsuccessful attempt to gain admission into Higher Education

The objective of this vignette (item 22) was to examine respondents' hypothetical preferences after experiencing an unsuccessful attempt to get admission into higher education, despite having obtained good achievement outcomes in the exit CE, to identify the possible consequences of this dilemma on young people aspiring to higher education and the underlying views that they hold about the exit CE. This dilemma is indicative of some of the responses to item 7 which asked respondents the reason why they were not yet in higher education. The vignette item is as follows:

> *Bola plans to study Law in the University. She made all her subjects at both the WASSCE and NECO SSCE. Last year, she wrote the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Exam (UTME) and got 240 but was not given admission. Her friend who had 220 got admission because she had 6 'A' grades, but Bola had only one 'A' grade. The University had used a Point-based system where students with better grades in the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations get higher points. Bola is about to fill the application for this year's UTME. She is wondering if she will be able to get admission this time if she puts Law as her first choice again, considering that she will be using the same result. If you are Bola, what course would you fill in and why?*

Table 13 below summarises the responses to this item.

Table 23: Summary of responses to Item 22

PREFERENCES	CONDITIONS	FREQ	%
Alter HE preferences	Permanently	106	**39.6**
	Temporarily	31	**11.6**
	Total	137	**51.2**
Persist with Law	Choose Law again	91	**34.0**
	Choose Law but Rewrite SSCE	14	**5.2**
	Choose Law but with another course	11	**4.1**
	Total	116	**43.3**
Choose another Institution	Choose Law	5	**1.8**
	Change course	4	**1.5**
Vague / ambiguous / uncertain / response		6	**2.2**
	Total	268	**100**

There were two main categories of responses to this vignette. The first category consists of the 137 (51.2% of 268) respondents who preferred not to select the Law course again. Rather, they would alter their aspirations to courses that they variously described as a *"course related to Law but has low cut-off", "non-competitive course",* "*lower course", "less grade course", "lesser course"* etc. to achieve their aspiration of going onto higher education. This preference had the highest number of respondents and was underpinned by a lower expectation of success, should Law be chosen again. Getting admission into Nigeria's higher education institutions, particularly the government-owned institutions is perceived as very competitive, as this respondent points out: "*most tertiary universities are so hard to get in" (S35).* And specifically, getting admission into a Law programme can be difficult as it is perceived to be an elite course within the Nigerian context. As a result, the competition to do Law is very stiff and the cut-off marks by higher education institutions are often high, as this respondent rightly observed "*getting admission into Law used to be difficult*" (S36). 31 respondents in this group however emphasised that their preference to alter their aspirations would be temporary. This was because they wanted to ensure "*better chances of getting admission*" (S37) by going for a less competitive course, while they would still make attempts to get into the Law programme in their second year of study. This respondent aptly describes it thus:

> *I will use lesser/lower course to get into the Tertiary institution. Then with my performance during the University's First level, I can change my course. because if I don't do like that, I will keep on looking for admission, so a wiser part is meant to be played. (S39)*

Within Nigerian universities, it is possible to process a change of course after the first year of undergraduate study. Yet, Law continues to be competitive. Therefore, changing to Law in the 2nd year is not an easy path because of the requirements that must be met in the first year of undergraduate study, as well as other bureaucratic hiccups within the University system. The major reason behind the preference to alter HE aspirations for many was that they did not want to "*waste time at home*" or "*sit back at home and while away time*". This echoed with sentiments like wanting to "*finish...in time"* and "*time is no longer on our sides. So, the early you get in the earlier you are out*". The main fear associated with the time factor is how

the delay can engender a perception in people that one was a failure, as this respondent describes it:

> *I don't want to be seen as a failure and I need to start pursuing my future early. If I can't fill in for Law, I'll look for a substitute. (S40)*

Furthermore, there was the chance of diminishing returns in knowledge-related outcomes when one spent a long time outside academic-oriented spaces, as this respondent points out:

> *I could put political sciences than staying at home doing nothing. Remember the more you study at your knowledge, [it] will not function as it functions before. (S41)*

Money was another reason behind the preference to alter the HE aspiration because rewriting the exit CE would require funds as disclosed by this respondent:

> *I will fill management related courses or other courses I think I can explore in. This is to prevent me from writing another SSCE, wasting another money. (S42)*

For nine (9) respondents however, it was the higher education institution that they would rather change to achieve their aspiration to go onto higher education. This is what one of them said:

> *If I were Bola, I will try to do better in my UTME and seek for admission in a less competitive school (university). This is the reason why many students don't gain admission. We all want to go to school with fame, big names etc. and it doesn't matter. I will do this because I love the course with passion. (S43)*

The perceived 'elite' status of institutions can influence their competitiveness amongst applicants, as the respondent above implies. Some of the factors that influence this perception include Teaching quality, research outputs, graduates' employability rate, historical reputation etc. As a result, the competition for places in these universities is high. Then, there are universities that are considered elite based on the cost of schooling there. These are Private Universities and the competition for places are not high because its cost already excludes a large proportion of applicants without the social capital for an expensive education. Thus, some respondents would rather alter the higher education courses or institution that they aspire to, in order to save time, save their dignity and save money to address this dilemma.

The second category of responses comprises the 116 (43.3% of 268) respondents who indicated that they would choose Law again, thereby sticking to their initial higher education aspiration. The willingness of this category of respondents to choose Law again indicates a level of expectation of success in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), despite their previous unsuccessful admission experience. While 91 of them did not specify any follow-up action to that decision, 14 respondents considered rewriting another exit CE, suggesting a willingness to invest time in achieving their higher education aspiration to do Law. However, 11 respondents indicated that although they were going to choose Law this time, they would specify another course as a second choice, which they were happy to change to subsequently if they were not able to secure admission into Law again. In conclusion, navigating the exit CE successfully is not a guarantee that other barriers to achieving HE aspirations would be successfully navigated. At that point, more than half of the respondents were likely to change their previous HE aspirations.

5.5.3 To indulge or not to indulge in Examination Malpractices

The objective of this vignette (item 23) was to examine respondents' hypothetical preferences in navigating the exit CE, if the opportunity to indulge in examination malpractices presented itself, to identify the possible consequences of this dilemma on young people aspiring to higher education and the underlying views that they hold about the exit CE. The vignette dilemma was:

> *Ada is Uju's friend. They both attend DEF school. Ada will stop attending DEF school by Friday, because she has registered for WASSCE and NECO SSCE at HIJ school. HIJ school would assist her get good grades through examination malpractices. Ada has advised Uju to also register at the HIJ school because she thinks "passing examinations is not about how intelligent you are". DEF school has good teachers and are working hard to prepare their students for the forthcoming examination. However, they will not take part in examination malpractices. Uju cannot re-sit the examination if she fails any subject because of finances. Now, Uju is wondering if she should listen to Ada and register at HIJ school. If you are Uju, what would you do and why?*

Table 14 below provides a summary of the responses to this item.

Table 24: Summary of Responses to Item 23				
S/n	**RESPONSES**	**Rationale**	**Freq**	**%**
1	Will not change school to Special Centre[8]	It is a crime	167	62.3
		It is wrong		
		Does not boost knowledge		
		Negative consequences		
		Punitive Repercussions		
		Unnecessary with good teachers		
		Undignified route		
2	Will change school to a special centre	Guarantees higher grades	71	26.5
		Financial difficulty		
		Unfair examination system		
		Corrupt educational system		
		Avoid emotional distress		
		Avoid delay		
		Uncertainty about achievement outcomes		
3	*Evaluate self and/or circumstances before deciding*		17	6.3
4	*Vague /Ambiguous/ uncertain /varied responses*		13	4.9
	TOTAL		268	100

There were two main categories of responses to this dilemma. The first category comprised 167 (62.3% of 268) respondents who stated that they would remain at the DEF school, which doesn't indulge in examination malpractices, while the second category comprised 71 (26.5% of 268) respondents who stated that they would follow Ada to the HIJ school that engages in examination malpractices. 17 (6.3%) respondents however implied that their decision would

[8] Special centres refer to secondary schools that actively engage in exam malpractices during the exit CEs for a fee from participating students.

depend on personal or contextual circumstances, while 13 (4.9%) respondents gave vague, uncertain or ambiguous responses. There were different reasons why some chose not to change their school. First were those who were unwilling to take part in examination malpractices because of its criminal status within the Nigerian context. Nigeria's Examination Malpractices Act (1999) describes different kinds of examination-related offences and prescribes punishments for such offences. However, the implementation of the penalties for engaging in examination malpractices as stipulated by the Act remains mostly non-existent. Some of the respondents noted how examination practices are *"a crime*", "*highly prohibited in the education system", "a great offence in Nigeria", "highly against the law*" and can "*get one jailed as detected in the constitution".* For others, the wrongness of engaging in examination malpractices stems from their religious values. Thus, "*examination malpractice is bad*" because it conflicts with the religious values that they hold dear. The respondents below articulated these values as follows:

I would vehemently refuse the offer because any result without God's stamp on it will never make a person truly prosperous. (S44)

examination malpractice is sinful before God and illegal. (S45)

Closely linked to the religious values are those who place intrinsic value on acquiring knowledge, rather than knowing for merely passing exams just as the respondents below assert:

if I am Uju I will not listen to my friend Ada because having the knowledge is better than doing examination malpractices. (S46)

I would not listen to her because there is nothing like knowing something for yourself rather than depending on malpractices. (S47)

Then some preferred not to engage in examination malpractices because of the consequences or repercussions that they associate with that choice. For some, engaging in examination malpractices engendered academic laziness as this respondent asserts: "*Exam malpractices makes a student to be lazy and deceived*" (S48). For others, engaging in *"examination malpractice is not a guarantee for good grades*", as buttressed by the following respondents:

I will stick with my DEF school because I am not guaranteed that going out to register at a special centre will make me pass my papers. (S49)

if I was the one, I will read and write it in my school…This is because even those that use malpractices still fail. (S50)

Then, some respondents preferred not to get involved in examination malpractices because of the possibility of being caught and penalised, either individually or collectively as a school. Penalties include the seizure or cancellation of individual or school-wide results such as described by these respondents:

If I go to a school where malpractice is good and was caught by external invigilators, they may seize my result and I will not have a result which is worse than failing. (S51)

I will not listen to Ada's advice…. Because the school Ada went to register for WASSCE and NECO SSCE may be caught in examination malpractices and their results may be seized. (S52)

For others, the consequences for indulging in examination malpractices that they envisaged was in terms of the impact on future educational pursuits and endeavours. They were of the view that a dependence on examination malpractices at that level could undermine the quantity and quality of knowledge they need to succeed in future examinations and educational endeavours. The following participants explain it thus:

I don't buy the idea of examination malpractice. So all I have to do is read hard and pass my exam because if I engage in malpractice in SSCE, who will then write my JAMB and Post UTME? (S53)

I won't consider [special centres] as an option because when you get the good grades in WAEC....when I get into school, I'll be affected because I did not gain knowledge which is a foundation of what I'll see in the university. (S54)

For some others, engaging in examination malpractices was unnecessary when good teachers were already available to help with preparing for the exams.

I will not register at HIJ school if I'm Uju because we have good teachers in our secondary school but if we do not have good teachers, I will follow Ada and register at HIJ school. (S55)

if I'm the one, since we have good teachers that can guide us in examination, I will rather stay and take it, without exam malpractices (S56)

Then some felt the need to maintain their dignity and be proud of their result like these respondents who emphasised how it was important for them to "b*e confident it was all by my effort", "be proud of my results*" and "*not feel guilty*".

The second category of respondents who preferred to change to the school that engaged in examination malpractices constituted 26.5% of the total respondents. For this category of respondents, the belief that "*no matter how bad examination malpractices sounds, it is a better option" (S57)* hold sway. Their expectation of success without the aid of examination malpractices seems to be lower. The pressure to get good grades in the exit CEs for students aspiring to go onto higher education is overwhelming for many, as this respondent rightly observed:

> *The country has made it a priority to pass exams rather than obtaining knowledge. You find out that sometimes, writing well... does not guarantee success. I wonder! (S58)*

Therefore, engaging in examination malpractices appears to be an opportunity that "*guarantees passing with higher grades".* For some of the respondents, the potential unavailability of money to rewrite the exit CE, if failure is experienced as stated in the vignette was the motivation for making this choice. For instance, one respondent justifies their decision with "*it will save my parents the cost ... of rewriting the exam if I eventually fail*" while another said their decision was "*because of my family's lack of finance".* For others, the motivation was rooted in the belief that Nigeria's examination system did not epitomise fairness. Thus, there was this '*Nigeria is Corrupt*' narrative by several respondents who saw it as a moral justification for the choice to engage in examination malpractices:

> *Nigeria is corrupt and for you to make your result, it's through examination malpractice. (S59)*

> *Nigeria is a corrupt nation so I would just register at HIJ school because whether malpractice or not, no one cares. (S60)*

> *Nigeria is corrupt so I have to follow the system. (S61)*

Within this '*Nigeria is Corrupt*' narrative, there were allegations that the examination system itself was riddled with malpractices like the merchandising of good results and the

involvement of the staff of examination agencies in examination malpractices. These are what some of the respondents had to say:

> *Sincerely speaking our society is full of malpractice and even when you work hard and get good result, they will end up selling your result to another person. (S62)*
>
> *"In Nigeria now, certificates are not really based on hard work even the WAEC official engage in malpractice. (S63)*

Then, there was the desire to minimise psychological distress like being "*heartbroken"* and physical discomfort like "*the stress of rewriting the exam",* if one did not do well in the exit CEs as well as to avoid delays to academic progression. Some justified their willingness to engage in malpractices with beliefs like "*examination is not a true test of knowledge*" as mentioned in the vignette item, and statements like "*it is almost the intelligent ones that have bad result*". Even amongst the 17 respondents who appeared indecisive, most of them tilted towards going to the school that indulged in examination malpractices. Some were deterred from preferring schools that subscribed to examination malpractices because of the cost of registering in such schools since registering for the exit CE there is more expensive than registering in mainstream schools. According to a respondent, registering for the exit CE at such schools require "*paying a huge amount of money*".

In conclusion, about two-thirds (62.3%) of the respondents were not likely to exploit the advantage of a special centre and its associated examination malpractices to successfully navigate the exit CE. However, more than one-quarter (26.5%) of the respondents would do otherwise. This raises concern about the consequences that the exit CE is engendering. In conclusion, young people who are aspiring to higher education have many reasons to support the preference not to change schools to one that promoted examination malpractices. But these reasons only make sense to the respondents when they are confident of being able to succeed in the exit CE without resorting to examination malpractices. When this confidence is lacking, (a lack that findings from the qualitative phase attribute to educational and social disadvantages as well as an experience of unsatisfactory outcomes), young people can easily subscribe to examination malpractices.

5.5.4 Finance and HE Aspirations

The objective of this vignette (item 24) was to examine respondents' hypothetical preferences when their aspiration to go onto higher education is threatened by financial limitations, to identify the resources within the Nigerian context that young people use to realise their HE aspirations. The vignette item is as follows:

> *Ovie lost his father when he was 7. It was tough for him growing up. His mother is just a petty trader. She insists that Ovie gets a University education, although she cannot afford the cost. When Ovie wrote the WASSCE, he did not obtain a Credit grade in English Language, which is required for University admission. Ovie decided to get a job, which he did. It's been 3 years now. Ovie is now ready to pursue a University education. He wrote the NECO SSCE and made a Credit grade in English Language. However, he needs to keep his job while schooling, as this is his only source of income. A part-time programme is not feasible because his course of interest –Medicine is not done through part-time programme. If you are Ovie, what would you do and why?*

The summary of the responses to this item is presented in table 15 below.

Table 25: Summary of responses to item 24

RESPONSES	**Conditions**	**Freq**	**%**
Pursue Higher Education	Keep job but change course	71	26.6
	Quit job and pursue higher education	68	25.5
	Change job or start a business	18	6.7
	Negotiate same job and still go for Medicine	12	4.5
	Sub-total	***169***	***63.3***
Quit Higher Education pursuits	Temporarily to save money	58	21.7
	Permanently because there is no money	14	5.2
	Sub-total	**72**	**26.9**
Other responses		28	9.8
TOTAL		**267**	**100**

There were three main categories of responses to this item. The first category of 169 respondents, which constitute the majority (63.3%) stated that they would proceed with their plan to go onto higher education. However, 71 of them leaned towards changing their aspired course from Medicine to other courses that did not require a full-time commitment. That is,

they would keep working while studying for a course that can be done on a part-time basis. These respondents explain:

> *a better idea is to change course of study to adjust to my working schedule while doing the part-time. (S63)*

> *if I'm Ovie, I will go for a course in part-time programme so that I will be able to retain my job, pay my fees in school and so many other things which is needed to be done in school. (S64)*

For this group of respondents, we see an unwillingness on their part to relinquish their source of income to achieve their aspiration to do Medicine. They'd rather change their aspirations than lose their jobs. This is similar to the group of 12 respondents whose preferred option was to keep at their current job and still go on to study Medicine, by renegotiating the terms of their working conditions with their bosses. These respondents illustrate how they would accomplish that:

> *I will take permission from my boss and ask him to give me free break for study…I will find a way to settle it. (S65)*

> *[I will] go for my course of study and reason with my boss or whatever job I am doing because after 3 years I should [have] saved up a certain amount to see me through. (S66)*

They did not want to change their aspiration and leave their jobs. So, they'd rather find a way to keep their job and still pursue their aspiration to do Medicine.

On the other hand, 68 respondents chose to quit their job and focus on achieving their aspiration to study Medicine. They acknowledge that it was nearly impossible to combine a full-time job with a full-time Medical programme. They, therefore, chose to leave the job for reasons like "*education is the best legacy"* and "*education is far important than the job",* as it had the potential of providing one with "*a better job"*. This however raises the issue of funding. Some of them described how they would "*seek for financial assistance from relatives and friends*", "*charity organizations*", "*scholarships*", "*loans*" or explore self-employment opportunities. Then there were the group of 18 respondents who would consider changing their jobs to "*part-time jobs or weekend jobs*", "*menial job opportunities*" or "*invest into a business".* For these respondents, we see a willingness on their part to sacrifice their current

jobs and explore alternative sources of income, while staying faithful to achieving their higher education aspirations.

For the second category, 58 respondents chose to temporarily quit the pursuits of their higher education aspirations in order to save up the fund required for higher education:

> *For me, I will quit the idea of entering school that year. Then I will continue with my job and save enough that will help me out in my pursuit to study Medicine in university. (S67)*

> *There is a saying that says to do things one after the other…. I will not only have one job but if possible three jobs and through that I will make and save a lot of money. Then, proceed to university education to study Medicine comfortably without pressure or stress. (S68)*

For these respondents, we see a willingness to invest time towards achieving their aspirations to do Medicine. Some of them argued that the time delay was not necessarily a problem because "*schooling has no age limit*", "*age is but a number*" and "*age is not a barrier to success*". Unfortunately, there was another category of 14 respondents who would rather give up on any form of higher education permanently and just focus on their job. They felt inclined to do so because of the financial difficulty associated with following up on their aspiration. This is how they affirmed this choice:

> *I will not go to school because I do not have money. (S69)*

> *I will forget about the course and university because there is not enough money in hand to support myself. (S70)*

Getting higher education can be a costly endeavour in the Nigerian context. It is therefore not surprising that some respondents preferred to suspend their aspiration to go onto higher education permanently. In conclusion, about two-thirds of respondents did not seem deterred from pursuing their aspiration to go onto higher education by financial limitations, as they intend to draw resources from their social capital to realise their aspiration to go onto higher education.

5.5.5 Repeated Experience of unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CE

The objective of this item was to examine respondents' hypothetical preferences after experiencing repeated unsatisfactory achievement outcomes in the exit CEs, to identify the possible consequences of this dilemma on young people aspiring to higher education and the underlying views that they hold about the exit CE.

> *Aisha finished secondary school two years ago. She wants to study Accountancy at the university. Unfortunately, she didn't make Credit grades in Mathematics and Accounts at both the WASSCE and NECO SSCE. Last year, she rewrote both WASSCE and NECO SSCE. She obtained a Credit grade in Accounts in the NECO SSCE, but her Mathematics was an E8 grade in both examinations. She was devastated. She decided to write the GCE instead. Result was just released. She got an F9 in Mathematics. If you are Aisha, what would you do now and why?*

There were three main categories of responses to this vignette (item 25) as illustrated in table 16 below. However, some respondents mentioned two or more actions that they would take. Therefore, the frequency below represents the references made to a particular category and not the number of respondents who made them.

Table 26: Summary and frequency of responses to item 25

RESPONSES	Conditions	Freq	%
Rewrite the exit Certificate Exam	a. Read hard b. Pray/ Trust God c. Private tutoring/Tutors	160	53.2
Change higher education Strategy	a. Change course	71	23.6
	b. Change Institution		
Quit HE pursuits	a. Temporarily b. Permanently	47	15.6
Other responses		23	7.6
TOTAL		301	100

This item engendered intense and humorous discussions amongst some of the respondents during the administration of the HSEEAQ. For three respondents, Aisha's case was

"*complicated*'. To gain admission into undergraduate Accountancy in Nigerian Universities, a minimum of the Credit grade was required in Mathematics and four other subjects. Furthermore, the subject combination for the University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) for Accountancy includes Mathematics. When there are waivers for the exit CE results, especially for the Direct Entry applicants into the second year of the university, results from higher levels of education such as the GCE 'A' level and professional examinations are used as substitutes (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2017). Oftentimes, a minimum of the Credit grade in the exit CE Mathematics would have been required to access these alternative qualifications.

The choice to rewrite the exit CE or its alternatives was the dominant response as it was referred to in 53.2% of the responses. This showed a continued willingness to achieve the aspiration to study Accountancy in the University. The motivation for some was rooted in beliefs like "*education is the key to success and to a good life*" and "*education is the best legacy*". Respondents mentioned things that they would do differently to avoid a repeat of previous achievement outcomes. First were those who stated that they would put in more effort into reading. Then some were willing to invest money and effort to engage private teachers and/or attend private lessons.

I will seek for a personal mathematics teacher and put extra efforts and equally ask him/her to tell the reasons for people's failure in exams and especially in mathematics. (S71)

I will go for lesson on mathematics to improve in mathematics. Then I will rewrite the WASSCE and NECO SSCE the next year because education is very important in life. (S72)

Some others spoke about praying to God fervently to influence the next achievement outcomes positively, while some disclosed a willingness to engage in exam malpractices like the following respondents:

I will find a way to make it in Maths, even if it means through malpractice. (S73)

if I were Aisha, I will register with malpractice centre. (S74)

This ambivalent attitude and deference to examination malpractices as a strategy for improving academic performance in High-stakes testing seems common in the Nigerian

context. This ties in with the responses to item 13 and the consequences of High-stakes testing that has been identified both internationally and within the Nigerian context.

The second category of responses belonged to those who made the choice to change the Accountancy course being previously aspired to or the type of institution previously chosen. For this category of responses, there is an unwillingness to invest additional time, effort and money in achieving the initial HE aspiration due to mostly a low expectation of success, if they rewrote the exit CE. This stemmed from a feeling that they were not "*fit*" or "*destined to study accountancy*". For some others, changing the aspired course was necessary to avoid "*wasting time"* since "*time waits for nobody"*. According to a respondent, "*rewriting another WAEC or NECO examination… is just a waste of time and resources*". Again, some respondents reasoned that there was no point rewriting the exit CE since the individual was weak in Mathematics such as these respondents:

> *if I were Aisha, I would change my course from accountancy to a nice course that does not require mathematics because it is obvious that mathematics is not her strong point and accountants need to know mathematics. (S75)*

> *I'll change my mind on the course I want to study. I would do that because there is a probability that if I write those exams again, I wouldn't pass. So, it's better to change course and go for one that is not too inclined in mathematics. (S76)*

For some others however, they would rather change their choice of institution (e.g. a Polytechnic instead of a university) or programme type (e.g. a National Diploma instead of a Bachelor's degree etc.). The final category of responses encompasses those who proposed quitting the pursuits of their HE aspirations either temporarily or permanently. For those who would quit temporarily, they hoped to use the break to do other worthwhile things like getting a job and acquiring vocational skills like these respondents:

> *I will quit for like 2 years and look for a job. Then after 2 years, if I still want to go back to school, I can now re-write the exam. (S77)*

> *I will leave the exams for a while and learn a skill or trade. (S78)*

For some however, quitting the pursuit of HE aspirations was going to be a permanent choice like some of the respondents who said they would "*quit education and pursue another*

career"(S79), "*end everything about education*" (S80) and "*give up on education*" (S81). This decision seems to emerge from both a low expectation of success and an unwillingness to further invest any resources towards achieving their higher education aspirations. In conclusion, the experience of repeated low achievement outcomes in the exit CEs can diminish young people's confidence and expectancy of success in another attempt. Thus, while most of the respondents preferred to repeat the exit CE, they refer to strategies like reading hard, praying and trusting God, getting private tutorials and even indulging in examination malpractices to increase their chances of success.

5.6 DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected using vignette-based questionnaires, this study found that:

1. More (50.6% of 261) respondents were of the view that the exit CEs accurately reflected what students were taught in secondary schools.
2. More (62% of 263) respondents were of the view that the exit CEs does not discourage students from completing secondary school.
3. More (54.7% of 258) respondents were of the view that the exit CEs pressured some students to engage in examination malpractices.
4. More (63.8% of 254) respondents were of the view that the exit CEs engendered anxiety and stress for students.
5. Most of the respondents (86% of 265) agree that one's educational plan can be altered by experiencing poor achievement outcomes in the exit CEs.
6. More (61.5% of 257) respondents were of the view that poor academic performance in the Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in their future careers.
7. Those who think that poor performance in the CEs is indicative of prior academic achievement in secondary school (39% of 264 respondents) is nearly equal to those who don't (39.4% of 264 respondents).

8. More (45.7% of 257) of the decisive[9] respondents view good academic achievement in the exit CEs as an indication that the students had good and quality teachers.
9. More (45.6% of 263) of the decisive respondents do not consider obtaining good grades at the exit CEs as the main reason for attending secondary school.
10. More (43% of 265) of the decisive respondents were of the view that it is easier to get good grades in the WASSCE (by WAEC) than in the SSCE (by NECO).
11. There is no evidence of significant relationships between the views of the respondents (as summarised from numbers 1 - 10 above) with either the gender or age of the respondents.
12. More respondents preferred to alter their course and institutional preferences for higher education when obstacles that are connected to successfully negotiating the exit Certificate examinations are encountered. This is because it is likely to make it easier for them to realise their aspiration to go onto higher education, help them avoid delay in their educational progress and save money.
13. For those who preferred to persist with their initial course and institutional preferences for higher education, they are motivated to do so by the intrinsic and economic value that they have attached to those preferences.
14. Young people who are aspiring to higher education have many reasons to NOT engage in examination malpractices. But these reasons only make sense to the respondents when they are confident of being able to succeed in the exit CE without resorting to examination malpractices. When this confidence is lacking and the opportunity presents itself, young people who have the resource and support from the significant others in their lives to engage in examination malpractices would prefer to do so to boost their chances of academic success.
15. Many respondents did not seem deterred by financial limitations from pursuing their aspiration to go onto higher education. They seem to be able to find ways to overcome this limitation through resources like *financial assistance from relatives and friends*",

[9] By decisive respondents, we mean respondents who chose either 'agree' or 'disagree', while excluding those who chose 'neither agree or disagree'.

"*charity organizations*", "*scholarships*", "*loans*", "*part-time jobs or weekend jobs*", "*menial job opportunities*" or "*invest into a business"*.

RQ1: *What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs)?*

The findings above have implications for secondary school leavers perceptions of the exit CEs and the consequences that it can lead to. First, it appears that the exit CEs and its awarded grades are perceived as reliable representations of what a student can do or cannot do. Therefore, students who cannot successfully negotiate the exit CEs are perceived as either undeserving of higher education or cannot succeed in higher education. This is evident in finding (1) where 50.6% of 261 respondents agreed with the view that the exit CE accurately reflected what was taught in schools, and in finding (6) where 61.5% of 257 respondents were of the view that poor academic performance in the Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in their future careers. This is also evident in the responses to vignette items 21 and 25 where unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CE were judged as indicative of a student's inability to do the courses that they aspired to. This highlights how the students themselves subscribe to the meritocratic ideals that underpin these examinations by considering unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CEs as the product of individual failings and shortcomings. In chapter 2, Meritocracy was shown to be problematic through how it does not consider structural inequalities. For instance, the respondents are aware of how the absence of good and quality teachers can have an impact on outcomes as evidenced by finding (8) above. Again, some of the respondents expressed willingness to engage in exam malpractices as indicated by findings (3) and (13), which already faults any meritocratic conclusion drawn from the results of those who engage in them. Therefore, this perception of the exit CE as indicative of what a student can do or cannot do is problematic, especially in situations where students do not have access to the same academic provisions and examination advantages.

Secondly, the exit CEs is perceived as capable of initiating delays to the realisation of young people's HE aspirations when poor outcomes are experienced. Therefore, many respondents would rather alter their HE aspirations and engage in exam malpractices than rewrite the exit CEs. Altering HE aspirations in some ways is preferred by many to realise their aspiration to go to higher education so that they can avoid delay in their educational progress, protect their dignity, and save money. Again, some prefer to engage in examination malpractices to increase their chances of success at one sitting of the exit CEs, avoid delays to their educational progress and save themselves from the psychological distress associated with such delays. Thus, the exit CEs can instigate young people aspiring to higher education to resort to corrupt practices, for them to realise their aspiration of going onto higher education. This usually happens when these young people have doubts about their ability to attain the success benchmarks in the exit CEs or perceive Nigeria's education and examination system as unfair and corrupt. In conceptualising the capacity to aspire as a navigational capacity, Appadurai (2013) notes that the capacity to aspire involves the use of the map of one's cultural context to explore the future frequently and realistically, something that those who are more privileged can do more than those who aren't. For young people who are aspiring to higher education in the Nigerian context, altering their preferences for higher education and engaging in examination malpractices appears to be how they try to explore their aspirational futures realistically.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings from the use of the vignette-based questionnaire, which was administered during the quantitative phase of the study. In Chapter 3, Nigeria's education and examination system were discussed. However, the views of young people regarding Nigeria's education and examination system was silent in this discussion because they are not available in existing Nigerian literature. To have a wider understanding of the unintended consequences that High-stakes testing facilitates in the Nigerian context, it was considered important to know what test-takers think about the exit CEs especially as it relates to the potential consequences for them as they aspire to go onto higher education. This was why a vignette-based questionnaire, which allowed young people to express their views and explain the rationale behind them was used. With the findings from this phase, a contextual

understanding of the perceptions of young people aspiring to go to higher education in the Nigerian context, regarding High-stakes testing, was achieved. Although these findings do not speak for all the secondary school leavers in that category, this chapter offers a glimpse into how young people with similar characteristics perceive the exit CEs and the ways that it affects them. In the next chapter, the research findings from the Qualitative phase of this study are discussed.

CHAPTER 6

LIVED EXPERIENCES AND NEGOTIATION OF NIGERIA'S SENIOR SCHOOL EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS (EXIT CEs)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the findings that addressed research question 1: *What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs),* were discussed. This chapter summarises the findings from the qualitative phase of data collection, which sought answers to the second research question: *How does the lived experience of the exit CEs influence secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?* Data was collected from each of ten secondary school leavers using a life-grid chart, a life-grid follow-up interview and a semi-structured interview (see appendices 2 and 3 for the life-grid and follow-up interview guide). To address the second research question, the following sub-questions guide this chapter:

a) What is the lived experience of the exit CEs like for secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education in Nigeria?

b) What strategies do secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education use to negotiate the exit CE?

c) What factors influence secondary school leavers aspiration for higher education?

Therefore, the secondary school leavers' lived experiences of the exit Certificate Examinations (exit CEs) is first examined to establish the essential features of the experience for the research participants. Afterwards, the strategies that the research participants employed to successfully negotiate the exit CEs will be discussed. Then, the factors that influence the formation of their aspirations for higher education are examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how experiencing the exit CEs influenced the aspirations for higher education of the research participants.

6.2 PROFILE SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The characteristics of the ten secondary school leavers who participated in this study are summarised in Table 17 below.

Table 27: Brief Profile of 10 Research Participants

S/N	**Research Participants (Pseudonyms)**	**Age**	**Sex**	**Type of exit CEs sat for & Year**	**Exit CE subjects where unsatisfactory** grades were experienced**	**Senior Secondary School Type Attended**
1	Chi	19	F	WASSCE (2016)	None	Missionary*
2	Cyn	19	F	WASSCE (2016); NECO SSCE (2016)	Economics - D7, Commerce - E8	Missionary
3	Abi	20	F	WASSCE (2016)	Literature-in-English -F9; Economics - F9; Government - F9; Maths - F9	Government
4	Ada	23	F	WASSCE (2014)	Economics – E8	Government
5	Jus	23	F	WASSCE (2013); NECO SSCE (2013)	Geography – E8	Private
6	Kam	18	M	WASSCE; NECO SSCE (2016); NABTEB (2015)	None	Missionary
7	Ame	20	M	WASSCE (2016); NECO SSCE (2016)	None	Government + Private
8	Isa	20	M	WASSCE (2016); NECO SSCE (2016)	Literature-in-English -E8; Agriculture - D7	Government
9	Ude	21	M	WASSCE (2014); NECO SSCE (2014)	Commerce - D7; Economics - F9	Missionary
10	Mas	22	M	WASSCE (2013); NECO SSCE (2016)	English – D7, Physics – E8	Government

*Missionary schools are private schools that are managed by religious organizations

**unsatisfactory is taken to mean the D7, D8 and F9 grades that are below the Credit grade. The Credit grade is the minimum benchmark for success in the exit CEs. While D7 and E8 grades are referred to as 'Pass', an F9 grade is a 'Fail'.

From table 17 above, it can be seen that six of the research participants (Chi, Cyn, Abi, Kam, Ame and Isa) completed secondary school and wrote the exit CEs in 2016, the preceding year

to when this study's data collection held in 2017. Jus and Mas completed secondary school and wrote the exit CEs four years prior in 2013, while Ada and Ude completed secondary school and wrote the exit CEs three years prior in 2014. At the time of the data collection, all ten participants were attending tutorial classes that were preparing students for the entrance examinations (UTME) into HEIs, another required High-stakes examination for those aspiring to go to higher education. Except for Abi who was also preparing to retake the exit CE, the remaining nine research participants were preparing for the UTME alone. Five of them attended public schools while five of them attended private schools. The data generated from these 10 participants were condensed into a rich Lived Experience Description (LED) for each of them, similar to the ones presented in appendices 10, 11, 12 and 13. This chapter discusses the findings that emerged from the themes that were identified through reading across these 10 LEDs (please refer to section 4.7.1 for the data analysis process).

6.3 LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

What is the lived experience of the exit CEs like for secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education in Nigeria?

In this section, the experiences of the research participants during the preparation and writing of the exit CEs, as analysed from the Life-grid chart and Life-grid follow-up interview transcripts are presented. Four themes were found to define what the lived experience of the exit CEs was like for the research participants, and they are - type of Exit CE, Home environment, Parental involvement, and Teacher-related characteristics. For all the participants, two or more of these four themes featured as key influences on their experience of the exit Certificate examinations. The ways that these themes defined the lived experience of the exit CEs are subsequently discussed.

6.3.1 Type of Exit CE

The ten (10) research participants wrote the WASSCE in the year that they completed secondary school, whilst 6 of them also wrote the SSCE. In chapter 3 (see section 3.2), it was

stated that both examinations are equivalent but independent of each other as they are conducted by different Examination Councils - WAEC for the WASSCE, and NECO for the SSCE. Many students often write the WASSCE as their main exit CE and write the SSCE as a supplement to boost their chances of successful grade outcomes in the year that they complete secondary school. Writing only one type of exit CE the first time is considered risky and detrimental to the aspiration to go onto higher education. For instance, Cyn opines that:

> *...the people that took NECO last year had an advantage than those that didn't take because you have no other option than to go and sit for another WAEC again if those [grades] are not yet complete because you need them for admission(Cyn).*

Since one's performance in examinations can be influenced by temporary personal circumstances over which a student has no control, such as illness on the day of the examination, emotional distress from being bereaved or crisis in the family, physical discomfort for a girl going through her menstruation period and so on, the participants view writing both exams as a way of reducing the risk of poor exam outcomes. The way that these unpredictable circumstances can affect examination performance is illustrated by Jus' experience whose mum was sick during the period leading up to the exams and died during the exams. According to Jus,

> *During that time, I was preparing for WAEC. I would just sit down and be thinking about [her]. The thing was disturbing me to the extent that in the night, it also disturbs me. I had to call her on phone because that was the period, they were taking her from one hospital to the other. So, that period that I was writing the WAEC was when they carried her to UNTH[10], Enugu state and that was where she died. Sometimes when I want to read and I remember her, I would not be able to read anymore.*

Therefore, writing both types of the exit CEs was used by many students to reduce the risks associated with not getting the desired exam outcomes in the year that they complete secondary school.

Amongst the four research participants who didn't write the SSCE in the year that they completed secondary school, three of them attributed this to the paucity of fund to pay for the examination while one of them was not allowed to do so by her father. The examinations

[10] UNTH is the acronym for the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital

are paid for by the students at the beginning of the final academic year in senior secondary school, to the Examination Councils by a specified deadline, although some state governments can choose to pay part or all of it for their candidates in their state (public) schools. Anambra state does not pay for the exams for students in their public schools although individuals or organizations have been known to pay for selected students as philanthropic gestures (see Ozoji, 2020). In 2020, the registration fee for the WASSCE was 12,950 Nigerian naira while the SSCE was 9,850 Nigerian Naira (both above £20 depending on the current conversion rate). There are other associated costs like fees for late registration, syllabus, result checker, collection of certificates, while schools usually add extra fees like administrative costs to the registration fee stipulated by the exam councils. Although the cost of writing the exams would have been lower in the years that the research participants wrote the exam, it was a sizeable sum for some of them. Thus, finance can put some students at a disadvantage in how they experience the exit CEs when their circumstances are compared to their peers who get to write both variants of the exit CEs because they can afford to.

In terms of reputation, the participants attached more credibility to the WASSCE (by WAEC) than the SSCE (by NECO) for achieving their Higher Education aspirations. This is reflected in how they indicated a preference for the WASSCE over the SSCE. According to these participants:

> *"WAEC is like the main thing. It's number 1 in West Africa. Rating WAEC to NECO is like rating an iPhone to an Infinix phone. So, you can see people will prefer WAEC than NECO" (Kam).*

> *I still prefer WAEC because they are more coordinated. The exams are well coordinated. They prepare well ... But NECO…still find it very difficult (Cyn).*

Again, several research participants rated their lived experience of the WASSCE (WAEC) better than that of the SSCE by NECO. For instance, Kam asserts that WAEC provided a "*more conducive environmen*t" for examinations than NECO. He described how the paramilitary staff that NECO employed to oversee the exams, distracted and disrespected students in their zealous attitudes to curb examination malpractices, but noted that "*there wasn't any*

disturbance" during the WASSCE. For Cyn who disclosed previously that WAEC was "*more coordinated*", some NECO examinations commenced late and NECO results were sometimes released late, such that students who needed to use it for admission processes into HEIs earlier in the academic year, could not.

Some participants also noted that the past examination papers for the WASSCE were more readily available than that of the SSCE. Students usually include solving past examination questions as part of the preparation for the exit CEs. For instance, Kam and Cyn who previously recounted unsatisfactory experiences of the SSCE noted that the limited availability /accessibility of past examination questions for the SSCE made preparing for them quite difficult. For Kam, the SSCE "*was a bit more difficult"* compared to the WASSCE, "*because there isn't really enough NECO past question papers [compared] to that of WAEC*". For Cyn, "*70% of [NECO's exam questions] you might not even know it [because] you might never have come across it before*". On the other hand, Ude who had engaged with NECO's past examination papers admits that the "*NECO exam...was easy. It wasn't that hard because… I practice all our past questions - both Annual and that NECO.* Thus, the availability and engagement with past examination questions appear to be an important part of preparing for the exit CEs.

Again, NECO's marking process was faulted as Isa, another research participant was convinced that there were corruption and discrimination in NECO's marking process. According to him: "*Corruption is always there. People who are marking [NECO] result...mark it anyhow - discriminately".* He believed that WAEC's marking process happened outside Nigeria, thereby making it less prone to Nigeria-based corruption, unlike NECO. Isa had compared his achievement outcomes in both examinations to the amount of effort he put into preparing for them, and therefore concluded that discrimination and irregularities in NECO's marking process were the reason why they were not commensurate. However, contrary to what Isa assumes, all WAEC's marking processes for Nigerian candidates are conducted and completed within Nigeria (Agbodeka, 2002), just like NECO. Having worked with WAEC before starting the PhD study, I can also confirm that WAEC's marking processes for Nigerian examinations

happen within Nigeria and there is a website[11] for coordinating current and prospective examiners within Nigeria. Some researchers (e.g. Obinne, 2011) have compared the reliability of both types of exit CEs but there is no consensus on which exam is more reliable than the other.

A disparity in the difficulty index between both types of exit CEs was also alluded to in the experience and perceptions of the secondary school leavers in this study. For instance, in this phase of the study, Kam and Cyn insisted that the NECO examination questions were "*a bit more difficult"* compared to that by WAEC. Similarly in the quantitative phase of this study, 43% of 265 respondents disagreed with the item on the questionnaire that stated that "*It is easier to get good grades in the NECO SSCE than it is in the WASSCE*", although 29.1% of them agreed with the statement and 27.9% of them were uncertain. Thus, more of the research participants in this study were of the view that the exit CE by NECO (SSCE) was more difficult than the exit CE by WAEC (WASSCE). This perception further buttresses why the WASSCE is preferred to NECO by many students in the Nigerian context, although they are equivalent examinations. Some researchers have investigated the item difficulty level of both exams although there are inconsistencies in the Nigerian literature about this. While some have argued that there are no significant differences across both exams (e.g. Aborishade & Fajobi, 2020; Adonu, 2014; Bandele & Adewale, 2013; Kolawole, 2007), others have argued on the contrary. For instance, scholars like Olutola (2015) claim that WAEC has a higher difficulty index while scholars like Anagbogu et al. (2011) attributed NECO to having a higher difficulty index. Considering the disparities in key variables like the subject, exam year(s), sample characteristics etc, the inconsistencies in the different studies are expected.

The choice to write both types of the exit CEs has its impact on the students. Aside from the financial cost, there is a demand on their time and energy. The SSCE commences after about two weeks interval from the end of the WASSCE. Exam candidates will expend time and energy to prepare for the exam and attend the exam as well. It is therefore not surprising that most of the participants prepare more for the WASSCE that is done first, than for the SSCE

[11] http://examiners.waecnigeria.org/

which comes later, in cases where they were writing both exams. According to the following participants:

"I prepared harder for WAEC than NECO" (Ude)

"[FOR THE NECO EXAM], I didn't prepare that much" (Mas)

"in NECO, I didn't read the way I read in WAEC". (Isa)

However, when students do not successfully navigate any of the exit CEs that they registered for, they can retake any of the exams to make up for any deficient or unsatisfactory results that they have experienced. Furthermore, students can combine results across both exams for admission into HEIs. Therefore, the research participants tried to increase their chances of success in the year that they completed secondary school by either registering for both types of the exit CEs or preferring the one with the better reputation for reliability. Students exercise their agency to do this because they want to minimise the risk of not getting satisfactory outcomes due to the unpredictability of the examinations' administration and outcomes. However, for many students, this agency is undermined by the financial disadvantage of not being able to afford both types of the exit CEs.

6.3.2 Home Environment

The home environment played important roles in how Nigeria's secondary school leavers experienced the exit CE. Amongst all the participants, Abi experienced the least supportive home environment, and her educational experiences in the period leading up to the exit CE illustrates this. Abi's biological mother died when she was a child. Growing up, she missed out on the emotional care and educational support that a mother could have given. Some studies such as Ratti (2011) and Pascual (2014) have shown that the death of a mother can negatively affect a daughter's education either due to the psychological impact of the death or a lack of academic/emotional encouragement. Ratti (2011) had interviewed eleven women whose mothers died when they were aged between 6 – 18 years; while Pascual (2014) had interviewed seven women whose mothers died when they were aged between 2 – 19 years. When Abi's father remarried, her stepmother did not want a relationship with her. As a result,

her maternal aunt took her away to live with a woman she did not have a prior relationship with. She was aged 18 at the time and was in SS2. She recalls that her stay with this woman was physically stressful and academically detrimental for her:

> *In that place, I faced a lot of challenges there even in my academics… I will work and work and I will be exhausted. I cannot even read my books. And I do attend school late. Sometimes I will not go to school. Even though she is very very rich. But sometimes to pay my fees, she will want me to stay at home for some time before she pays my school fees.*

Evaluating Abi's circumstances, it seemed that her role in this woman's house was as a domestic servant, although she never described herself as such. The phenomenon of 'domestic servants' is well known in the Nigerian context (Nwaubani, 2017; Tade & Aderinto, 2012). They are commonly referred to as 'house girls/ boys/ helps. They are often sourced from families with low socioeconomic status and could even be relatives of the employer (Okafor, 2009). Their roles mostly include helping their employer/guardian with domestic chores and/or commercial activities. Most times, they don't get paid directly for their services. Rather, their families or the middle person who made the arrangement gets paid, while the employer still owes it to the house girl/boy/help to have them trained in a skill or ensure they get educated. For many of these house helps, the terms and conditions of their employment continue to contravene both national and international stipulations with many of them been poorly treated (Nwaubani, 2017; Tade & Aderinto, 2012). While there are preventive and punitive measures by the Nigerian government to address these contraventions, they persist. The Nigerian media is awash with stories of abused and maltreated domestic servants (see Egielewa, 2018).

When Abi left this woman nine months later, it was to be a house help again for another woman that she referred to repeatedly as her 'Guardian', whom she was still living with at the time of the current study. She defined her guardian as: "*someone that takes the responsibility to take care of me, [who] is not my parent*". According to her, this guardian had good plans for her and wanted her to go onto higher education.

My guardian that I stay with now wants to give me the best - the best she can in my academics…that was why she registered me for another O' Level exam …so that I can further to university.

However, this guardian was uncooperative when Abi was preparing for her exit CE. Abi's role as a house help in the guardian's house meant that there was an existing demand on her time to serve the guardian, which was sometimes detrimental to Abi committing enough time to her preparations for the exam. For instance, Abi notes that "*sometimes when I'm reading, she stops me".* She recalls that her guardian also prevented her from attending extra tutoring which took place mainly outside the hours of mainstream schooling because her guardian expected her to return from school on time. Abi describes her circumstances thus:

My school ...organized lessons, private lessons for us. So, apart from the school period lessons, they give us extra mural lessons which we paid for. So, we attend the lesson but my guardian… she didn't understand what the lesson meant. So, she doesn't allow me to attend the lesson often. The lessons will take place from…the morning by 8 am and the lessons will continue until 5.

In addition, Abi did not have books and other resources she needed for the exit CE. According to her: "*most textbooks I don't have them. I struggled to get what I want for the exam".* These circumstances at her home environment detracted from her preparations for the exit CE. This may have negatively impacted on her achievement outcomes in the exit CE where she had E8 grades in English and Biology, as well as F9 grades in Economics, Government, Literature-in-English and Mathematics.

For Ada who became an orphan while in primary school, the impact of the home environment is also visible as she subsequently had to live with different relatives till date. After the death of Ada's parents, a distant female cousin took her to Kaduna State, North-West Nigeria where she lived. This was where Ada completed her primary school and junior secondary school education. Ada describes her educational experience during this period as unpleasant and recalls that this cousin "*used to maltreat"* her while she lived with her. For instance, Ada was forced to hawk goods in the mornings and therefore could only attend an afternoon school. By the time she gets to school in the afternoon, she would be tired and inevitably sleep during class lessons. She also recalls taking the 60th position in a class of about a hundred students. She summarised her educational experience while living with her cousin thus:

I don't know what education is there… I don't know what they are saying in the class…I normally sleep because I normally wake up in the morning and go hawking. After hawking, I come to school. So, I normally find [education] difficult.

Fortunately for Ada, she returned to Southeast Nigeria to start her senior secondary education and enthuses that this was when she started "*enjoying academics"*. This time, she lived with her elder sister who Ada said, "*wants me to stay close to her so that she will know everything about me, protect me…*". Ada displayed a strong awareness of the impact of the home environment on her educational experience and academic achievement as she notes that:

… at that Kaduna, I was not doing well at all. Even the level of my understanding went cold because I'm the kind of person that used to take good position in the class but as I went there I don't normally take it as anything, due to the poor [treatment] they used to give me [at home].

Moving to Anambra state and living with her elder sister who treated her better than her distant cousin who lived in Kaduna State, made education for her "*more interesting".* She also made good grades in the WASSCE (the only exit CE she sat for) except for Economics where she had an E8 grade.

In their review of the research that identified different family factors influencing student achievement, Christenson et al. (1992) reported that home environment positively correlates with student achievement. Thus, high student achievement is associated with a home environment where there is support for learning and a push for academic achievement. This is evident in Chi's experience. Chi had the most supportive home environment in this study as her home provided her with a positive learning environment. In Chi's home, there was strong support for her learning, enabling structures for her to take schooling seriously and a strong push from her father and siblings to achieve academic excellence. Chi lived with her biological family and had a lot of support from them while preparing for the exit CE. Her younger siblings took over her house chores, which meant that she had ample time to just focus on study. As a result, Chi had time to attend "*private lessons"*, "*read very hard*" and even stayed "*awake in the night to read*". Chi went on to achieve excellent grades in all the subjects that she sat for at the exit CE. This contrasting experience of Abi, Ada and Chi show

how the home environment can shape the experience of the exit CE differently. Furthermore, it highlights the weaknesses of meritocracy when it attributes success or failure to innate individual characteristics, without recognising the impact of social inequalities on examination outcomes. Thus, a home environment that does not encourage learning or actively push for academic achievement can be inhibitive for students preparing for High-stakes examinations.

6.3.3 Parental Involvement

Closely linked to the home environment is the important ways that parental involvement defined how the exit CE was experienced. Parental involvement during the preparation for the exit CEs provides supportive structures that can be a motivation to achieve. Amongst all the participants, Chi experienced the most of parental involvement. For instance, Chi's father was actively involved in her educational activities as she prepared for the exit CE. He also put high expectations on Chi to achieve and created the enabling environment to do so. As a teacher by profession, he provided extra tutoring for her, especially in the English Language - his teaching subject, and ensured that she was left alone to spend time to study as much as possible. According to Chi:

> *My brother will come and tell me it's just like the school exam you used to take. Just calm down. My daddy will tell him, 'shut up'. Let her read.*

Chi revealed that she was motivated to prepare very hard for the exit CE to avoid upsetting her father, who threatened to enrol her in a vocational skill acquisition programme rather than at a higher education institution if she didn't make good grades at the exit CE. She described the circumstances thus:

> *I worked very hard to make sure that I didn't get anything like 'P' mostly. I don't want 'P' in my result. If I get to get 'P', my daddy will be very upset with me. Do you know what my daddy always says to me? If you fail your WAEC, I will never register it for the second time. I will just take you to any workshop even if it is hair making or dressmaking. You will go there and learn how to make dress or hair... So I had to read very hard to make sure I didn't rewrite my WAEC.*

Chi sat for the exit CE while still in SS2 (the penultimate class to completing senior secondary school), on the instigation of her Father and the precedent set by her elder brother. Her

Father's reason for making her register for the exit CE while still in SS2 was to "*save time"* and save the cost of an additional year in secondary school: "*I took WAEC in SS2 … my daddy said it's even better, instead of you...wasting money".* Again, her father did not let her register for the SSCE (by NECO) because he felt it had limited utility outside Nigeria. She thus registered and sat for only the WASSCE (by WAEC):

> *My dad didn't approve of (NECO). He said NECO is only used in Nigeria. That I must pass my WAEC. Even if I use NECO to support it, I can't use it outside the country. (Chi).*

A positive relationship has been found between parental involvement and student achievement by many researchers (e.g. Boonk et al. 2018; Dufur et al. 2013; Jeynes, 2007; Fan & Chen, 2001; Christenson et al. 1992; Steinberg et al 1992). In their review of 75 empirical studies that explored the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement and which were published between 2003 and 2017; Boonk et al. (2018) found that for students in middle / high school and beyond; parental involvement in the forms of high expectations and value for achievement, the provision of academic support/ encouragement and the presence of parent-child educational discussions yielded positive relationships with students' academic achievement. This seemed to be the case for Chi who obtained excellent grades in her exit CE results, as well as Kam, Mas and Ame, other research participants, whose mothers were the parents that were actively involved in their academic activities during the preparation for the exit CEs. For Cyn, it was both of her parents and family relatives that were involved in her education and examination experiences while for Ude, it was his older siblings that were involved in his educational and examination experience, ensuring that he lacked nothing and motivating him to stay in school.

6.3.4 Teacher-related characteristics

Another factor that defined how some of the research participants experienced the exit CE was the availability/shortage of teachers and the quality of teaching in their senior secondary schools. Teacher shortage was a phenomenon that some research participants experienced, which affected the quality of their preparations for the exit CEs in the long term. For instance, at Cyn's school (a private school that is managed by Christian missionaries), they had no

Mathematics teacher from the second term of SS1 until the first term of SS3. This meant that for five academic terms out of eight academic terms in senior secondary school, these students were deprived of learning mathematics. This made Cyn "*hate the subject".* In retrospect, Cyn wished that she had the economic means to solve the mathematics teacher shortage problem at her school: "*if it was possible that I could employ teachers myself, pay them privately, I would have really loved to do it*". Her rationale was that teachers "*are the people that mould children to what they want to be"*. Cyn believes that if she had the teachers she needed, her achievement outcomes would have fared better at the exit CE. Her rationale for this claim was that:

> *If I was able to make that kind of result with personal study, I believe if I had teachers too, coaching me up and teaching me all that, I would have made more than that.*

The shortage of a Mathematics teacher was also experienced by Abi when she began her senior secondary education. She recalls that the school she attended at that time lacked "*adequate teachers to teach Maths…very well*"; and as far as she was concerned, the available teachers "*cannot teach [and] they cannot give students what they need*". This led to the negative experiences that she had learning mathematics in subsequent years. According to Abi, "*Mathematics confuses me. So, I hate it*." Even up till the point of the interview, as she prepared for the second exit CE, she acknowledges a "*struggle to study mathematics*" and attributes this to having "*no foundation*" in Mathematics while in secondary school. The shortage of Mathematics teachers has been indicted as one of the problems affecting the effective learning of mathematics in Nigerian schools (Azuka, 2015; Bosan, 2018; Ihejieto, 1995).

By contrast, Kam experience was different as he attributes his success in the exit CEs to the availability of qualified teachers in his school (a private secondary school that is managed by catholic missionaries). According to Kam, teachers were "*the reason why I got all these 'A's, and especially in Physics, Chemistry and Biology*". Kam spoke positively of the school principal who was at the helm of affairs, describing him as someone who ensured that the students did not lack anything they needed to improve academically. Kam recalls that the Principal "*employed more teachers*" as they prepared for the exit CE. For instance, they had three

different teachers for English Language subject alone, handling different domains of the subject. An additional teacher was employed to help the students in the STEM subjects on the weekends, in addition to those who taught them during the week. Then there was the university lecturer who was employed part-time to specifically help students in understanding how to conduct experiments in Chemistry. These teachers motivated the students to give their "*best"* and "*all"* to pass the examinations.

For some other research participants, the way that their teachers taught them undermined their ability to learn the content that was taught. For instance, Isa attributes his weakness in Mathematics to the way that the mathematics teachers had taught him. He explains that:

> *Teachers...are... the barrier why [I] don't understand maths. Because sometimes when they come to the classroom to teach...they will just explain it to their own taste and then leave without asking a question.*

In his Life-grid chart, Isa included Mathematics among the subjects that he listed under the subjects with his worst performance, although he attained a credit grade in it. Jus also attributes her weakness in learning Geography to how the teacher taught the subject. According to her:

> *I don't understand that man... The way he is teaching us, I don't understand. So…sometimes I don't even attend the class. When they will be doing geography, I will just carry my…Maths or Physics, go outside and be reading.*

Jus would go on to obtain an E8 grade in Geography at the exit CE. For Ude, his disillusionment with Chemistry was because of the way that the new teacher who took up the subject in SS2 taught it. He describes his experience thus:

> *When I was in SS2, they changed the teacher...She will just tell you to go and read something like this. If you come in the class, it will be more of discussion. You will come and explain. And you know when you are in secondary school, a teacher needs to at least give you guidelines. But as of that woman...if you ask question, she will ask you to ask from your neighbour students.*

Chemistry as a subject involves the introduction of new concepts at that level for the students. Many of these concepts felt abstract to Ude; hence, his dissatisfaction with the discussion technique that the teacher employed. Considering that "*what constitutes effective instruction varies with context"* (Brophy and Good, 1986, p. 370), the discussion technique for Chemistry may not have been appropriate for the students at that level as it inhibited rather than

facilitated learning for Ude. Then, there was the classroom dynamics within which the discussion was expected to hold. Ude and one other student were the only boys in the Science class, as the rest were girls. Jude recalled that asking the girls questions, as expected in the Chemistry class was a futile exercise for him because according to him*, "they will not give you what you want*". Ude eventually left the Science class and joined the social sciences because of this experience with Chemistry. Drawing evidence from an extensive Australian research project—the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS), Lingard (2007) found that "*teachers and their practices (pedagogies and assessment) are the most significant element of schooling in respect of student outcomes and schooling as a positional good*" (p. 247).

This differential experiences of teachers and teaching provide support for the critiques around the idea of meritocracy when educational inequality contributes to young people's academic achievement. It is however striking to note that these research participants mainly described their senior secondary school teachers in terms of if and how well they taught them. Little or nothing was disclosed about affective relationships with these teachers in terms of receiving encouragement and support from them. In her study, DeJaeghere (2018) identified affective relationships with teachers as beneficial for her very disadvantaged participants in vocational secondary level education in Tanzania. This is similar to the findings by Reid and McCallum (2014) discussed in chapter 2 for Australian students from low socio-economic background. In this study, affective relationships with teachers did not seem to define the lived experience of the exit CEs for the research participants.

6.4 NEGOTIATING THE EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (EXIT CE)

What strategies do secondary school leavers aspiring to go to higher education use to negotiate the exit CE?

This section focuses on three main strategies that were employed by the research participants to enable them to successfully negotiate the exit CEs. These strategies which are peer groups, private tutoring and examination malpractices are subsequently discussed.

6.4.1 Peer Groups

Peer reading groups were supportive resources for some of the participants as they prepared for the exit CEs. Chi referred to her peer reading group as "*group readers*" and mentions that studying with them was one of the ways she prepared for the exit CE. She surmised their activities as follows:

> *We used to work together, read together, share our views. Any [question] that you can't solve, your partner knows how to solve it. We interact and solve the question.*

The reading group was a space for them to address the difficulties that they encountered in their individual academic lives, as a group. The reading group had a group leader, scheduled meeting times and an attendance register. Group meetings often involved homework that had to be solved individually and resolved together in a subsequent meeting. This reading climate promoted continuous academic engagement in ways that reinforced achievement-oriented behaviour for the members of the peer reading group. Chi's reading group was similar to that of Isa's reading group which comprised three of his friends and was named "*SKAM*" (an acronym of their nicknames). According to Isa, the SKAM reading group was quite "*famous"* amongst his classmates and he attributes his success in the exit CEs to his affiliation with the group. What they did mainly was work together to solve past examination questions. Like Isa's reading group, Chi's group readers also spent some of their time solving past examination questions. Engaging with past questions is considered a crucial part of preparing for the exit CEs by both students and teachers alike. In Chapter 3, Bosan (2018) had highlighted the significant role that past questions played for mathematics teachers by determining what and how they taught Mathematics.

According to Appadurai (1996), collective imagination is an important tool for driving action. Although, his conception of the 'collective imagination' was referred to a societal level of cooperation amongst many people or a larger scale of institutionalized collaborations, the

principle of cohesion and collaboration that underlies collective imagination can apply to young people's belief in peer groups. Mas who has some regrets about the kind of peer groups he kept while in secondary school disclosed that he would advise his younger self:

> *To always keep positive peer groups, that is, those ones that will be advising you on how to read because back then, we make friends with everybody. We did not select a certain people that you move with that will affect you academically. (Mas)*

He opined that his academic achievement could have turned out better if he had affiliated himself with such positive peer groups. According to Wentzel and Caldwell (1997), a positive peer group can promote values and behaviours that can encourage or enhance academic achievement. Sometimes however, the influences of peer groups can be negative when they encourage values and behaviours that are unethical or detracts from academic achievement. For instance, Jus was influential in encouraging some of her peer(s) to participate in examination malpractices at her school. The school Proprietor asked them to pay some money for assistance during the examinations and Jus advised her peers to do as asked:

> *[the Proprietor] asked us to pay N3,000. So I said since he asked us to pay N3,000, we should go along with it because WAEC is not about how intelligent you are. …. The DSP [Deputy Senior Prefect] asked me what we should do. I replied that we should do what our peers were doing. If they say 3,000, we pay. If they say 1,000, we pay as long as the assistance is for everyone.*

Thus, as Wentzel & Caldwell (1997) rightly noted, peer relationships can serve different functions in the academic lives of young people. These functions can be inhibitive or supportive in terms of influencing academic achievement, and for many young people, the influence exists.

6.4.2 Private / Extra Tutoring

Attending private/extra tutorials was employed as one of the strategies for successfully negotiating the exit CE by most of the participants. Attending private/extra Tutorials (commonly referred to as 'extramural Lesson' or 'coaching' in the Nigerian context) is regarded as a necessity when preparing for the exit CE. The stakes associated with obtaining good achievement outcomes in the exit CEs, engender the high demand for private/extra

tutoring by the students who can afford it. When several participants were asked how they prepared for the exam, they mentioned attending private/extra tutorials among other things. For instance, these research participants had these to say:

"I attended lesson for WAEC, NECO and JAMB[12]". (Ame)

"I attended an afternoon lesson for the WAEC" (Isa)

"After school, I go for private lessons" (Chi)

Some research participants disclosed that not attending private/extra tutorials affected them. For instance, Isa held the view that his performance in Mathematics would have been better if he had engaged in extra tutoring. According to him, "*supposing I have been attending Maths lesson back then, I would have been better than as it was now".* For Abi, her inability to attend these extra tutorials were among the reasons she gave for her poor achievement outcomes in the exit CE. According to her: "*it is in that extramural lessons that we are taught important things for the exams*". When asked what her preparation for the next exit CE was like, she replied: "*I increased my mode of reading and I attend lesson unlike last year*". Sometimes, the perceived need for these extra tutorials stems from a belief that the regular school hours is not enough to exhaust the requirements of the teaching syllabi or scheme of work. According to Cyn, "a*nother problem schools usually have is [that] they find it very hard completing their scheme of work for students".* The exit CEs questions are meant to cover topics from SS1 to SS3 across all the school subjects. Therefore, schools are expected to have covered the teaching of all the topics adequately before students sit for the exit CEs. For some schools, teacher shortage makes this impossible, while teaching quality, as previously highlighted, continues to be a problem.

Nonetheless, some students need private/extra tutoring because of academic deficiencies. During the quantitative phase of this study when the vignette-based questionnaire was administered, some respondents made references to attending private lessons and getting private teachers, as one of the ways that they would deal with experiencing unsatisfactory

[12] JAMB is the exam agency that administers UTME, the entrance exam for Nigeria's HEIs. Please see section 3.5 for more details.

outcomes in the exit CE (see Chapter 5, section 5.5.5). Private tutoring helps to bridge the learning gaps caused by teacher shortages, teaching ineffectiveness and inadequate coverage of the syllabus content; as well as address the deficiencies in students understanding of the subject content. Again, in some homes, private tutoring is aimed at keeping the students academically engaged or help with their school homework in the absence of parents or guardians who should fill that role (Oyewusi & Orolade, 2014). For instance, in their study which examined junior secondary school students attitudes and use of reading and electronic media in Enugu state, Nigeria; Babarinde et al. (2018) had included an item in their questionnaire that asked the students what activities their parents liked them to do outside school. 40.1% chose the option – '*Go to extramural class*'. This response ranked the highest amongst 5 options. However, when the students were also asked to identify possible hindrances to their reading habits at home, 41.7% of them stated that it was having to attend this '*extra lesson after school'*. Although parents and students are the ones driving the demand for private tutoring, the commercial motive underlying the proliferation of private tutoring cannot be overlooked. Private tutoring is provided by many teachers in mainstream schools as a means of earning extra income. In some settings, these teachers can deliberately make private tutoring a necessity by partly or inadequately covering the scheme of work during school hours (Bray, 2013). Then, some private individuals or businesses drive private tutoring mainly for profit-making by taking advantage of the competitive nature of the examination contexts.

Against this background, private/extra tutoring continues to thrive in the Nigerian context. They are popular during preparations for High-stakes examinations, but they also thrive for students at all educational levels. These examination-oriented private tutorings are mostly concerned with how to pass examinations, which is why their curriculum and pedagogy is centred around examination tips and content. However, private tutoring can worsen the inequalities that already exist in an education system (Bray, 2013). Studies like Kalikova and Rakhimzhanova (2009), Dedić et al. (2006) and Putkiewicz (2006) that were identified in chapter 2, found that private tutoring worsened inequalities. This is because students who are from low-income families are unlikely or unwilling to afford private tutoring, thereby setting them at a disadvantage to their peers from higher-income families who can afford

private tutoring. For instance, Berberoğlu & Tansel (2014) found from their study that "*students who did not receive private tutoring come from lower cultural and socioeconomic environments*" (p. 693). They had used multiple linear regression analysis to evaluate the impact of private tutoring on Turkish High school students' academic performance in the Higher Education Entrance Examination (HEEE).

While there is no literature evidence of a similar trend in Nigeria, I did witness students been chased away from the private tutorial centres where my data collection occurred, because they were yet to pay the tutorial fees for the month. This provides additional evidence of how the idea of meritocracy for selection is problematic because attending private tutorials is unevenly distributed amongst students who write the exit CEs. Nonetheless, while access to private tutoring may be difficult for those who are disadvantaged, many of them will still find ways to benefit from it in order to change their circumstances. In his review of private tutoring countries, Bray (2003) observed that "*middle-income and even poor families may choose to invest in [private] tutoring in order to gain economic mobility through the examination system*" (p. 34). In conclusion, since participating in private tutoring is viewed as necessary for students who are preparing to write the exit CEs in the Nigerian context, it can be argued that Nigeria's exit CEs engender the pervasiveness of examination-oriented private tutoring. Again, there is the potential for private tutoring to change the dynamics of learning for students preparing for the exit CE. For instance, the emphasis is placed on solving past-questions while learning focuses on contents that are likely to be assessed in the examinations.

6.4.3 Examination Malpractices

Nigeria's exit CE can engender the growth of examination malpractices and a sympathetic disposition towards it. In this study, some participants subscribed to different forms of examination malpractices, as one of the strategies for preventing the achievement of poor /unsatisfactory grades. Yet, examination malpractice is illegal in the Nigerian context and there are stringent punitive measures in place for erring students and schools. The main type of examination malpractice that was mentioned in this study was the registering for the exit

CEs by some research participants at 'special centres', to boost their chances of success. Special centres (also called 'Miracle' centres) are secondary schools that actively engage in examination malpractices in order to provide exam candidates with illicit assistance during the exit Certificate examinations, for a fee (Alhassan & Anya, 2017; Igwe, Ogadi & Nwokobia, 2013; Onyedinefu, 2019). The activities of these special centres continue to undermine the goals of education and the integrity of the examination system in Nigeria (Chibuike, 2015). They benefit financially from what they charge the students, while the students are meant to benefit by getting good achievement outcomes in the examinations. These research participants describe the special centre phenomenon thus:

> *A special centre is a place whereby if you register, you will pay highly so that you will be supplied answers during the exams, which some paid and some didn't pay. But those that didn't pay were not allowed to use the [answers] they supplied. So, they decided to keep them at a side. And those that paid, they were supplied answers (Ame).*

> *Special centre is all about where students are not the ones who write the exams. They have supporters. So, it doesn't mean that there won't be those who write the exams unassisted. It's just that there are those that will contribute money for what they will use to bring 'expo[13]' into the class (Jus).*

When students pay any stipulated fee at these special centres, then a choice to engage in examination malpractices is made because those who do not pay are excluded from benefiting from the illicit assistance that the special centre provides. These participants explain how this exclusion was accomplished in their schools:

> *"Yes, we paid the money. Everybody contributed and those that did not contribute stayed on one side that day. No assistance on that [side]." (Mas)*

> *"people normally pay to get assistance. But there are those that did not pay because there is a place that they will keep those that have paid [from] those that did not pay…they normally concentrate on those that have paid (Ada).*

[13] Expo here means unapproved materials that are smuggled into the examination

Because of the fees involved, some students are unable to participate in the special centre arrangements even though they desire to. For instance, Ada did not benefit from her school's arrangement because she couldn't afford to pay the stipulated fee although she wanted to. She believes that her grades would have been better if she had. The secondary school leavers who participate in the special centres' arrangement for examination malpractices, do so because they believe that it increases their chances of obtaining good grades at the exit CEs. For instance, Ame asserts that he was able to make good grades in all the subjects he sat for, because of the special centre he registered at. However, Jus who participated in the special centre arrangements in her school did not obtain satisfactory grades in some of the subjects she sat for. Abi noted that everyone (those who paid and those who did not pay for the special centre assistance) in her school "*failed*" the WASSCE. This might be a penalty on the school by the exam agency if they had discovered the malpractices. Two of Chi's friends left her school to write the exit CE at a special centre, but only one of them had successful grades in all the subjects she sat for. While research participants like Jus insist that the special centre arrangement happens in all the school types; participants like Ude, Kam and Chi who attended Christian missionary schools said it was not an issue in their schools, probably because of their religious identity/affiliations.

There are secondary schools that do not engage in or support examination malpractices. Sometimes, their students leave in their final year to register for the exit CEs in schools that are special centres. For instance, Ame completed his secondary education at a school in Ebonyi state, South-East Nigeria and asserts that he enjoyed his time there. He reported being satisfied with how teachers taught them, the level of discipline, school administration and his social life in the school hostel. However, for about three consecutive years, students in this school did not make great results in the exit CEs. Against this background, Ame said he was "*advised not to register*" for the exit CEs in that school, rather he "*should go for another school.*" So he registered and sat for the exit CE at a special centre in another State, where answers were supplied to them during the examinations. Chi also decided to leave her school to register for the exit CE at a special centre, on the instigation of her friends who did so. However, her Father adamantly refused, insisting that Chi wrote her WASSCE in the Missionary school she was attending. She described the incident as follows:

many of my classmates left the school. They left the school for private centres so that they will help them with the exams. When I came home to tell my daddy about that, my daddy said … that he is not even ready to take me out of that school. Even if it cost millions to take my WAEC in that school, that I must take my WAEC in that school.

For Abi as well, it was her father who discouraged her from getting involved in the special Centre arrangement organized by her school during the exit CE: "*My daddy said that I should not be involved. He said that I should study hard, that I should not be involved in malpractice…So, I obeyed him".* Sometimes, students get complicit or implicit approval from their guardians or parents to use special centres because they are the ones who pay the fees (Alhassan & Anya, 2017). For instance, Ame insists that the choice to register at a special centre was his mother's idea. According to him:

I wasn't the one that chose it for myself. My mum decided to register me to a special centre, so I was left with no other option than to abide by what she said.

In the research literature, parents continue to be indicted as one of those promoting the persistence of examination malpractices in the Nigerian context (Onuka & Durowoju, 2013). Even in the responses to the vignette-based questionnaire that was used in this study, a respondent wrote that they would write the exit CE at a special Centre "*if my parent is in supportive(sic) of that*", while another echoed a similar willingness to engage in exam malpractices if their "*parents' values and probably views... does not strongly stand against malpractice*".

Different forms of examination malpractices thrive in these special centres. In Mas and Ame's cases, external mercenaries were paid to answer the questions outside the exam hall, and these answers were supplied to the students who paid. This also happened at Jus' school against the background of collusion between the examination officials and the school. However, some schools are not explicitly special centres, but they support or ignore incidences of examination malpractices going on in them. For Cyn, her peers colluded with each other and with their teachers to commit several examination infractions. Special centres undermine the aim of examinations when they contaminate the examination process that is meant to assess students' academic competence (Alhassan & Anya, 2017). This also faults the whole idea of meritocracy, because those who engage in exam malpractices and those who

do not will be selected on merit supposedly, but the process is already corrupt. Merit under this circumstance is not objective and accurate. Because of the persistence of this problem, different punitive and preventive measures have been put in place to curb the trend. The examination agencies prescribe sanctions for special centres, such as been deregistered as an examination venue for several years, blacklisting of erring supervisors and the cancellation of entire results or specific subject results, when cases of examination malpractices by them are established (e.g. see WAEC, 2018). For instance, the chemistry result for Jus' school was cancelled. According to her: "[The exam agency] *noticed the exam malpractice. That was why they cancelled the chemistry (Jus)*. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria has laws in place that prescribe punishment for erring students as well as the clampdown on such special centres (Onuka & Durowoju, 2013).

Despite all these measures, many continue to choose to register for the exit CE at Special Centres and/or engage in corrupt examination practices. This study also found that although the choice to participate in examination malpractices is mostly voluntary, many students with cooperation from their schools and the significant others in their lives, are willing to engage in examination malpractices. More than half (54.7% of 258 respondents) of the responses to the vignette-based questionnaire held the view that the exit CE pressured students to indulge in examination malpractices (see chapter 5, section 5.4). Responding to the last vignette item that asked what they would do if they experienced failure repeatedly in a core subject, a respondent stated that:

> *I will look for **exam centres** that can help me out but if I can't pay the dues, I will try to study my mathematics hard and other subjects by attending lessons because time waits for no man.*

In response to the vignette item 23 on examination malpractices, more than a quarter (26.5% of 268) of the respondents disclosed a willingness to choose the special centre where examination malpractices thrived. The students who would choose special examination centres justified their choices with reasons like to guarantee better grades, to save time (avoid delay to educational progression and economic mobility), save money (because they couldn't afford to pay for another examination), save their dignity (many families are not tolerant of

failing), avoid emotional distress and a perception that the examination system was corrupt and unfair. There was an unwillingness to risk the possibility of not passing the exit CE at one sitting like this respondent who said that s/he "*would not take the risk of failing my exams*". However, studies like Makaula (2018) attributed examination malpractices on the part of students to insufficient preparation, laziness and wanting to pass at all cost. Makaula (2018) had administered closed-ended questionnaires to students and conducted focus groups with Malawian students. This kind of deficit view about why students engage in exam malpractices, which is prevalent in literature, may be problematic. This is because what is construed as arising from laziness and insufficient preparation for the exit CEs, might be the best preparation that some students can offer, against a background of social and educational disadvantages that High-stakes examinations tend to reproduce and exacerbate.

6.5 THE ASPIRATION TO GO ONTO HIGHER EDUCATION

What factors influence secondary school leavers aspiration for higher education?

This section examines the formation and negotiation of the research participants' aspirations for higher education using their responses to the life-grid, life-grid interview and semi-structured interviews. This is important to know because their aspirations for higher education determined the subject combinations that the participants eventually registered and sat for at the exit CEs. Two key themes – significant 'other' and economic prospects – emerged as the key influences on the research participants formation and negotiation of their HE aspirations. These themes are explored subsequently in detail.

6.5.1 Significant Others and the Aspiration for Higher Education

For most of the research participants, the aspiration to go onto higher education and the aspirational preferences for higher education course programmes and institutions were influenced by the expectations and/or experiences of the significant 'other' in their lives. The

'other' that is significant in this study refer to the individuals that strongly influenced the behaviour of the research participants. In this study, the significant 'other' include family members (nuclear and extended), teachers, peers and sometimes, role models. This is similar to the findings from research like Fray et al (2020) and Archer & Dewitt (2017) discussed in Chapter 2 (see section 2.5.2). An example from this study is Ame who began senior secondary school aspiring to be a medical doctor, on the instigation of his father. According to him, it was neither his desire nor his choice:

> *That was my dad wish when I was small. He said I should study hard so that I will become a doctor. So, I decided to read hard but as time goes on, the thing didn't later work.*

By the time he got into SS3, he changed his aspiration to Electrical Engineering, on the prompting of his mother and by putting into consideration his weak grasp of Chemistry as a school subject.

> *my mother decided that it will be better if I go for EE - Electrical engineering. So, I buy the idea…. I decided to take that path.*

As at the time of the data collection, Ame was sticking to electrical engineering justifying this choice by how it aligned with his childhood interest and fascination for fixing electrical stuff.

For Chi, her higher education aspiration in SS1 was to study Law. The motivation to study Law emerged from an 8-years dispute between her father and his extended family over the ownership of a Land. When the case was taken to court, her Father lost the case, and this had a huge impact on her. She recalls that the sad news caused her to become "*so depressed"* that she made up her mind to "*be a lawyer"* so she could reopen the case in the nearest future and "*take charge*". Hence, the aspiration to study Law at the time. However, several incidents that were connected to the 'other' in her life influenced her to later decide that a Law degree was not suitable for her. First, Chi's father discouraged her from aspiring to a Law degree because he had doubts about her ability to obtain the cut-off score in the entrance examination (UTME) for admission into Law, which is always very high across all higher institutions. The UTME is another High-stakes examination that must be successfully negotiated to realise the aspiration to go onto higher education. Her father's stance about not studying Law was supported by an uncle of hers who studied Law. This uncle insisted that

getting admission into Law and succeeding eventually was "*not an easy task*". Having two significant adults in her life expressing doubts about her ability to successfully negotiate the High-stakes entry examinations into HEIs with questions like "*are you sure you are going to make it*?", put pressure on her to reconsider her HE aspiration to do Law.

Then there was the unpleasant experience of a peer who completed secondary school five years earlier than she did. This peer, whose higher education aspiration was Law, had been unable to secure admission into a Law programme by the time Chi completed secondary school five years later. Since she did not "*want to experience the same thing"* that the peer experienced combined with the unsupportive attitude from her father and uncle, she changed her aspiration from Law to '*Banking and Finance*'. Strikingly, her choice of Banking and Finance stemmed from the influence of an 'other' in her life. She recalls that a teacher had always referred to her as a Banker from childhood, which influenced her new aspirational preference:

> *Since my primary school, my teacher always calls me a Banker. She says that I behave like a banker. So I have to choose banking and finance to fulfil the name my teacher used to call me.*

Chi asserts that she is "*determined*" to excel in the 'Banking and finance' course, despite the circumstances surrounding her new aspiration. However, Chi also noted that if she had not been able to successfully navigate Mathematics as a school subject, Law was a choice she would reconsider because the course content did not involve Mathematics, unlike Banking and Finance.

Cyn's higher education aspiration was also Law when she was in SS1. However, her parents were also unsupportive of a future career in Law. She also narrated the unpleasant experiences of an uncle whose licence to practice was revoked and who left the country. This uncle now discouraged family members from going into the law profession unless they were already in the profession.

> *My uncle… told my dad that nobody in our family shall ever study that Law. Unless the person has been studying it before. As in, it's a kind of a dirty game altogether on its own.*

Her description of the Law profession as a '*dirty game'* stems from the bureaucratic frictions and politics that her uncle experienced when he was living in Nigeria. As a result, Cyn changed her mind and now aspires to a degree in Accountancy. This choice of Accountancy was also influenced by two 'other' in her life. The first was an encounter with her school counsellor who suggested accountancy as one of two options. According to her:

> *my parents were not in support of me being a lawyer. So I had to drop it. So I had to start thinking. Going for counselling classes to my Guidance and Counsellor to ask - what are the subjects I can still do apart from being a lawyer? She was like, what are the other subjects I love, and I do well in them, and I will love to do? I told her I love Economics and I love Accounts. She said that I can still be an Economist or an Accountant. I should choose between the two of them. So I felt that Economics is a good course and I picked it. But I started going further into the course, [I found that] it's something that is broad and it's so bulky. Ah! I said No. let me just leave it. Let me just go and be an accountant. I just love the course because it's very straightforward. There is nothing confusing about it.*

Therefore, a career counsellor is an 'other' that can shape young people's aspirations, although Cyn was the only participant who mentioned a career counsellor as instrumental to the formation of her HE aspirations. Cyn's aspiration to be an accountant was further consolidated by another encounter with an individual that she met at a career fair organised by her school. She remained consistent in her aspiration to pursue an Accountancy degree throughout the data collection period.

In their narratives, Isa, Mas and Ude made references to role models who provided positive images of what their future selves in that role would look like. These role models who are chosen by the young people are often people who successfully represent their imagined futures. For instance, Isa early and persistent interest in the Military was fostered from childhood by family members who served in the Military or similar professions. According to him:

> *My grandfather was a Force Man, a military man. And my Father was also a Military man before the war broke, I mean the Civil war. He now joined the Nigerian Army and later on retired. My senior brother must be a Captain by now in the Nigerian Army. My brother (another one) is in the Police, Anambra State command. I also have other members of my family which include my in-laws, niece who are into Force. So, I just want myself there. I just start liking Force, right from time.*

In addition to his aspiration to join the Military, he intends to study Political Science at the Military school. The choice of Political science was influenced by "*prominent Nigerians who read that course*". He went on to list four prominent Nigerian Military / Paramilitary officers who he said all studied Political Science. For Mas who aspired to study Mechanical Engineering, his main role model was an uncle who was a successful engineer. Mas saw in this uncle the kind of future he aspired for himself.

> *The one I'm looking towards mostly is the one that is doing engineering course – electrical engineering... He has money. He has his own car, house and everything. He's comfortable.*

Ude, on the other hand, looked up to visible role models in the Nigerian context. In his words, "*I looked up to a lot of people in life*". For instance, his initial aspiration to a career as a Pharmacist in SS1 was influenced by a famous Pharmacist who had made a huge impact on Nigeria's war against fake drugs. In SS2 however, Ude changed his HE aspiration of studying 'Pharmacy' to 'Business Administration' when he moved from the Science academic track to the Arts academic track. To do Pharmacy, he had to be in the Science academic track and study subjects like Physics, Chemistry and Biology. But when most of his friends joined the Arts academic track in SS2 and he was unable to blend in with the new crowd in the Science class, he chose to join his friends in the Arts. This is how he puts it:

> *Some of my friends...in school...majority of them joined Art class and those ones that I'm with in Science class are not the ones that I used to cooperate well with and... most of them are girls. It's only one boy. So, I checked it. I don't know whether I can continue. So, I just dropped everything about Science when I was in SS2.*

Since his HE aspiration of Pharmacy was no longer possible because of the change in the aspiration that was partly triggered by his peers, he had to choose another aspiration. To do so, he asked some of his friends for recommendations on the courses that aligned with his subject combinations and they suggested Business Administration. So, he adopted Business Administration as his new HE aspiration based on their recommendations. For the second time, his peers influenced his HE aspiration. However, he wasn't comfortable with this choice

because he felt that Business Administration didn't have "*serious*" prospects and status. In SS3, he investigated other available courses and settled on Economics and Management. Here we also see Ude demonstrating his agency to make informed choices on what to aspire to. This choice was also influenced by role models in that field. According to Ude, *"I looked up to Charles Soludo, the former CBN[2] governor. He is an Economist. I [also] looked up to this former Minister."* Thus, even when his HE aspiration was changing every academic year, the 'other' continued to influence the formation of his HE aspirations before sitting for the exit CEs. The focus of aspiration here is mainly the course preferences for study in higher education because all the research participants were aspiring to higher education due to the purposively selected sampling strategy.

From the above accounts, two types of role models are observed. First are the role models that come from within the family and second are the role models that are public figures. Ude sought his role models amongst public figures. He followed current affairs in Nigeria and actively selected the public figures that he would use as role models to help him imagine a future for himself. This allowed him to 'try out' different aspirations and move between them. The lives of these public figures, as represented in the media, were his source of information, helping him to understand possible career paths available to him in contemporary Nigeria. The public figures he was drawn to held upright and hero status within Nigeria as they are respected for their moral rectitude and achievements in the notable positions that they occupied. Mas, on the other hand, selected role models from his family or those who were around him. For Isa, there seems to be a bit of both. He chose the military based on how it has been modelled by several family members. However, to choose the particular route into the military, he was influenced by public figures. For both Isa and Ude, their engagement with public figures through the media made them knowledgeable about career pathways that exist beyond the possibilities offered by observing family members.

According to Buchmann and Dalton (2002), the influence that the 'other' have on aspirations can be as either as a definer or as a modeller. The definers influence aspirations by explicitly communicating their expectations, encouragement and experiences (Ibid.). Thus, aspirations can be triggered by the narratives of a close relationship like a relative or friend who has had

firsthand experience and comes back home to share such stories (Appadurai, 1996). In Ame, Chi and Cyn's cases, the 'other' in their lives were definers. This resonates with DeJaeghere (2018) and Stockfelt (2015) studies that found a relationship between aspiration formation and close relations with family members. Analysing the interviews from nine girls who studied at a Tanzanian secondary vocational and technical school over 4 years, to understand how their aspirations were articulated, enacted and achieved using their agency; DeJaeghere (2018) found that significant others (teachers, peers and family members) helped the girls imagine alternative futures and map the trajectories toward their aspirations. For Stockfelt (2015) who studied the aspirations of Jamaican secondary schoolboys aged between 10 and 17, the "*maternal family members in the Jamaican Diaspora of higher-income countries like the UK, the USA and Canada*" (p.22) were identified as one of the influences on their aspirations. The modellers on the other hand shape aspirations through the kind of examples that they provide (Ibid.). This was the case for Isa and Ude who used the media to obtain examples of public figures that influenced the formation of their HE aspirations.

6.5.2 Economic Prospects of the Aspiration for Higher Education

Another influence on the HE aspirations of the research participants was the perceived employment prospects and monetary value of aspiration when realised. For instance, Jus exercised her agency to switch her aspiration from Medicine to Biochemistry after she left secondary school. Her choice of Biochemistry emerged from discussions with a friend who was studying Biochemistry and who assured her of the job prospects associated with the course. According to this friend:

> *Biochemists always get jobs...They can of their own, get a job for themselves. They can work in any place – hospital, any company.*

This convinced Jus that Biochemistry was a worthwhile higher education aspiration and she "*decided to go into that"*. Kam, on the other hand, was concerned about the monetary benefits that could accrue from whatever he aspired to be. His career aspirations were to be an aviator, app developer and web designer. While the aspiration to be an aviator stemmed from his childhood interest, the aspiration to be an app developer and web designer emerged

from his perception of the opportunities for economic mobility and prosperity in the future. This is how Kam explains it:

> *The world is going towards the digital era. So I have to shift…. We have to go with the wave…I was watching CNN one particular time. One guy, he is Nigerian. He said that the only course that can make the son of a poor man very wealthy is computer science, app developing. Because you know Mark Zuckerberg, he developed Facebook. Out of nothing, he became like the 6th richest man in the world …So when I go with the wave, I'll make my own app, and then get revenue from it.*

In this account, the role of the media as a platform through which information is obtained to shape HE aspirations is evident, since the information about the economic prospects of being an app developer and web designer, was sourced from the media. We also see the role of the 'other', in this case, Mack Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook), as a modeller for what Kam should aspire to.

On the other hand, Cyn's resolve not to do Law was strengthened by an encounter with a Lawyer at a career fair. This lawyer presented the students with a very dismal view of the financial prospects for practising law in the Nigerian context, such that it convinced Cyn that a career in Law would not be a worthwhile aspiration for her. She describes the experience thus:

> *A lawyer talked to us. He said that there are challenges facing that law. Some people find it difficult. After reading that course - law, it's very hard to practice. That's the problem we find here in Nigeria. He was like, he himself today, is not even practising as a lawyer. He is working as an agent - House agent.*

As of 2018, Nigeria's unemployment rate for its labour force stood at 23.1% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018b). Getting employment after higher education is an important reason why many get a higher education. Unfortunately, many HE graduates find it difficult to get a job after graduation, and for many who do get a job, they are underemployed especially in sectors unrelated to what they studied at the higher education institutions. The Accountant, on the other hand, was able to convince Cyn of the job prospects for an accountant in the Nigerian context. She describes the encounter thus:

> *The accountant works in the bank anyway. So I asked him, how come he read accountancy and he is in the bank? He was like [as an] accountant, you can work in oil companies, you can work in hospitals, you can work in schools as a bursar or*

cashier. You can work in any area of life you want to do. Just so far you want to be in financial management. So, I was like, this is what I want to do. I love it. And it's something that I can fit in anywhere.

Her resolve to be an accountant was thus strengthened by this encounter as she evaluated the marketability of the accountancy profession positively. In the Stockfelt's (2015) study of Jamaican boys' aspirations, the instrumental value of higher education for achieving wider life aspirations (including wealth and fame) were also determinants of their HE aspirations. For Mas, the aim of going onto higher education is to be equipped financially to take care of oneself and family, as well as have prestige amongst people. Therefore, one's HE aspiration has to have good financial prospects. Unfortunately, education weakly correlates with future livelihoods in contexts where poverty and unemployment are high (DeJaeghere, 2018).

6.6 DISCUSSION

RQ2: How does the lived experience of the exit CEs affect secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?

This discussion draws together evidence across findings from the use of the questionnaire (presented in chapter 5) and life-grid + interviews (presented in this chapter) to address RQ2 above. The way that the exit CE is experienced can initiate a series of circumstances, which can cause delays to realise the aspiration to go onto higher education. This was the case for Abi who registered for only one type of the exit CE (the WASSCE) in the year she completed secondary school. Unfortunately, she '*failed*' (in Abi's words), having obtained 'F9' grades in Mathematics, Government and English Literature as well as an E8 grade in the English Language. These were subjects that were crucial to her higher education aspirations. Abi's WASSCE result came as a shock to her because she felt that she adequately prepared for the examination, despite her peculiar challenges. According to her: "*When I saw it, I couldn't believe it was my result. I was confused"*. She recalled being very confident before the exams about succeeding but was unfortunately disappointed. Confronted with the unpleasant WASSCE result, she had to suspend her plan to write the entrance examination into the HEIs and focus on rewriting the exit CE instead. She was preparing to do this at the time of the data

collection, and this had set her back by at least one academic session, depending on how she fares in the exit CE she was about to write.

Mas also decided to rewrite the exit CE after seeing his WASSCE result. Like Abi, he registered for only one type of the exit CE (WASSCE) in the year that he completed senior secondary school. When Mas saw his WASSCE result, he "*wasn't that happy"* because he had obtained an E8 in Physics and a D7 in the English Language. According to Mas, this was a "*problem*" because his interest lay in studying Mechanical Engineering, which required at least a Credit grade in both subjects. As a result, he contemplated switching his aspirational course of choice from Mechanical Engineering to Agricultural Engineering, since he "*scored very well in Agriculture but a little bit poor in Physics*". The problem with that, however, was his D7 grade in the English Language, which he admits "*was not that good because you need …. to have Credit in English before they can offer you admission for higher institution*". Thus, like Abi, he decided to rewrite the exit CE. Unfortunately, he couldn't do so immediately because of the paucity of fund. He would spend the next few years working on a family business venture instead. Three years later, he rewrote the exit CE and obtained credit in the subject that held him back initially. At the time of the data collection, he was preparing for the entrance examination into HEIs. Thus, if unsatisfactory outcomes are experienced in the exit CEs, it can set in motion delays to educational progress.

In the quantitative phase of the study, numerous references were made to the impact that the exit CE can have on people's time. All other factors (e.g. academic achievement in the exit CEs and HEIs entrance examinations, finance, interest for HE) remaining constant, students who aspire to higher education should make the transition into HEIs about a year after completing secondary school. The profile of the respondents to the vignette-based questionnaire shows that many secondary school leavers are not making this transition on time. Many research respondents had completed secondary school 8 years (1 respondent), 7 years (1), 6 years (2 respondents), 5 years (14 respondents), 4 years (28 respondents), 3 years (35 respondents) and 2 years (78 respondents) before data collection happened in the year 2017. It is this potential impact on time that underpinned the hypothetical preferences and

lived experience of many to alter their aspirations in some way. The misgivings that secondary school leavers have about having to spend extra time before transiting into higher education is captured by this respondent who humorously stated that they "*can't spend another year at home plus African parents, life would not be easy...in a Nigerian house*". The uneasy life they envisage was likely linked to the stigmatisation and friction that would result from being in proximity to one's parents as a young adult/teenager. For many young people, this potential of the exit CEs to cause delay to their educational progress is undesirable and unpleasant.

Nigeria's exit CEs can also initiate a series of circumstances, which can cause young people aspiring to go onto higher education to change their aspirational preferences for higher education in some way when unsatisfactory outcomes are experienced in them. This is similar to the findings by Rodriguez & Arellano (2016) and Klinger & Luce-Kapler (2007), which showed that the outcomes that students experience in High-stakes examinations influence the way that High-stakes testing affects educational aspirations. Although students employ different strategies to boost their chances of obtaining satisfactory outcomes in the exit CEs, some will obtain unsatisfactory outcomes nonetheless, with or without these strategies. The change was usually from a course programme or institution preference that they had before the exit CE examination, to different one(s) that match the grades that were obtained in the exam. Sometimes, the change is with regards to time; hence, the choice by some to suspend temporarily or permanently, any efforts directed at realizing the aspiration to go to higher education.

In the quantitative phase of this study, a massive 86% of 265 respondents to the vignette-based questionnaire held the view that the exit CE could influence people to alter educational plans when poor outcome is experienced in the examination. Poor exam outcomes describe grades that fall short of the requirements for being admitted into higher education to study preferred courses, in a highly competitive context where demand substantially exceeds HE provisions. Again, 61.5% of 257 respondents were of the view that successes in future careers can be affected by poor exit CE outcomes. This suggests that even though students have additional chances to re-sit subjects with unsatisfactory outcomes in order to pursue their aspirations, there is a likelihood for these aspirations to appear "unattainable" after initial

setbacks; hence, the willingness to deviate from previously held HE aspirations after unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CE. For instance, the responses to Vignette 1 (item 21 on the HSEEAQ) revealed that 42.7% of 267 students said that they would drop the initial aspiration of being a mechanical engineer and pursue music after Effiong experienced poor outcomes in the exit CE, if in a similar situation (see chapter 5, section 5.5.1). For Vignette 2 (item 22 on the HSEEAQ), 51.2% of 268 respondents hypothetically chose to choose another course that wasn't Law after an initial failed attempt to gain admission into Law (see chapter 5, section 5.5.2). These views also reflect the lived experiences of some of the research participants in the qualitative phase. Some of them changed the aspirations that they had before the exit CE, to new ones that matched the grades they attained in the exit CE. For instance, Cyn and Jus aspired to study Accountancy and Medicine respectively before sitting for the exit CEs. However, after obtaining grade deficiencies in their exit CEs, they considered new aspirations – Entrepreneurship for Cyn and Biochemistry for Jus. Although these options changed again and both participants reconsidered their earlier aspirations, it is evident that exit CE outcomes can engender the alteration of young people's aspirations.

However, exit CE outcomes do not engender delay to educational progress and the altering of the aspirations for higher education, in isolation. Exit CE outcomes intersect/interact with the 'other' in the lives of young people to affect their aspirations for higher education. Thus, how secondary school leavers respond to unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CEs depends on the influence of the other in their lives. Therefore, someone like Cyn with dense family networks can respond to examination disappointments by adjusting their plans, in line with the family's expectations. She changed her course to Entrepreneurship at some point, but extended family members opposed it. She eventually went back to her previous aspiration of accountancy. She recounts the experience thus:

> *So one of my aunties called….when I told her I wanted to change my course [to Entrepreneurship] because I am that person that if I want to do something, I like to ask around from people…When I was asking, my uncles were like 'don't do that thing'. They did not like …'entrepreneurship'…. they say…I must study that 'accountancy' because everyone liked [it].*

Within the Nigerian context, extended family members are an integral part of young people's family network and they serve as both definers (e.g. Cyn's uncle) and modellers (e.g. Mas' uncle). As earlier mentioned, definers influence aspirations by explicitly communicating their expectations, encouragement and experiences while modellers influence aspirations through the kind of lived examples that they provide (Buchmann and Dalton, 2002). An orphan like Abi, effectively removed from the family home and in a servant-mistress relationship with her Guardian, has a reduced family network from which she might identify definers and influencers. So not only is she disadvantaged by having less support, less finance and less time for exam preparation but she has less access to information on the pathways into HE. Therefore, the lack of dense family networks that also include extended family members can be a disadvantage in the Nigerian context.

There also appears to be a gendered pattern in how the other influences young people. The girls were mostly influenced by definers (e.g. Chi and Cyn) whereas most of the boys were influenced by modellers (e.g. Isa, Mas and Ude). A possible reason for this is how a lot of cultures within the Nigerian context inherently define expectations for the girl child. In their study, Odimegwu & Okemgbo (2000) found that there were defined expectations for the girl child in Abakaliki, the capital city of Ebonyi state, another state in Southeast Nigeria such as when/who to marry. They note that the boys have more freedom to exercise their agency in making choices about their marital future. This is similar to the findings in this study where the boys exercise their agency more to determine what to aspire to. For instance, Ude and Isa engaged with the media to glean information on who to choose as role models and aligned their aspirations accordingly. Again, when Ude discovered that he was not comfortable in the science stream in SS2, he adjusted his plans. For the girls, however, their agency was exercised in subjugation to the expectations placed by the other in their lives. For instance, Cyn and Chi aspirations had to be vetoed by family members, and it is discarded if not approved. Thus, the bias against the girl child in the wider cultural context can spill into the formation and negotiation of their HE aspirations. When this happens, it further emphasises how structural inequalities exist in the meritocratic underpinnings of high-stake examinations. Therefore, the ways that outcomes in the exit CEs can intersect with the 'other' in the lives of secondary

school leavers, to influence their aspirations for higher education can be different for boys and girls.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The secondary school exit Certificate Examination (exit CE) is a hurdle in Nigeria's educational system that young people who are aspiring to higher education have to successfully navigate, in order to achieve their HE aspirations. This chapter explored how secondary school leavers who were aspiring to go onto higher education experienced and negotiated the exit CE, to identify the kind of consequences that it engenders in the Nigerian context. First, the role of the type of exit CE, home environment, parental involvement and teacher-related factors in shaping the experience of the exit CEs was examined. Then, the negotiation of the exit CEs using strategies like peer groups, private/extra tutoring and corrupt examination practices were explored. Since the focus of this study was on young people's aspiration to go onto higher education, a brief overview of how these aspirations are formed through the influence of significant 'others' and considerations of the employment/earning potential of the aspirations, was provided. Two key findings emerged from this phase of data collection. First, Nigeria's exit CE created an environment for engendering examination-oriented private tutoring and examination malpractices to thrive at the systemic level. Second, the way that Nigeria's exit CE is experienced can engender delay to academic progression and influence young people to adjust their aspirations for higher education in some ways. Thus, although all the participants had not given up on their aspiration to go onto higher education, some of them have had to adjust these aspirations in some ways to courses that they perceive as more accessible to them. Oftentimes, these adjustments were made in the light of their outcomes in the exit CE, alongside the influence of the 'other' in their lives, and this appears to play out differently between boys and girls. This, therefore, addresses the second research question which asked: *How does the lived experience of the exit CEs influence secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?* In the next chapter, the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phase of the study will be further interpreted and discussed as it relates to each other, using Appadurai's (2013) conception of the capacity to aspire, in order to address the third research question (RQ3).

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the unintended consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate examinations (exit CEs), for young people aspiring to higher education. The findings from the data collected using questionnaires, life-grids and interviews were presented in chapters 5 and 6, respectively. To address the research aim, the findings in chapters 5 and 6 will be integrated within this chapter to address the third research question - ***What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?*** This chapter will draw theoretical guidance from Appadurai's (2013) conception of the 'Capacity to Aspire' to address this research question. The key argument in this chapter is that the exit CEs create a constraining environment for young people's capacity to aspire to higher education through its reproduction of social and educational inequalities, the influence of significant others on the experience and negotiation of the exit CEs as well as the nature of grade outcomes from the exit CEs.

7.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ1: What do secondary school leavers aspiring to go onto higher education perceive to be the consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit certificate examinations (exit CEs)?

The research findings show that more than half of the respondents to the High Stakes Examination and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ) were of the view that Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate examinations (exit CEs) pressure students to engage in examination malpractices as well as engendered anxiety and stress. More than half of the total respondents also held the view that poor examination outcomes in the exit CEs can influence young people to change their educational plans and can affect success in a future career. The exit CEs was also perceived to accurately reflect what was taught in secondary school and was not indicted as a factor that hindered students from completing secondary school. These views about the exit CEs did not significantly differ by either the gender or age

of the respondents. Examining the respondents' hypothetical solutions to exit CEs dilemma, it was found that outcomes in the exit CEs are perceived as capable of causing delay to academic progression; hence, many young people aspiring to higher education preferred to alter their subject choices, to avoid delay to getting admission into HE institutions. Again, many young people aspiring to go to higher education indicated they would consider and participate in examination malpractices, to increase their chances of getting better grades at the exit CE, to avoid delays to their academic progression and save themselves from the emotional distress and cost associated with such delays.

RQ2: How does the lived experience of the exit CEs affect secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education?

For young people aspiring to higher education in the Nigerian context, their lived experiences of the exit CE were shaped by factors like the type of exit CE that was sat for, their home environment, parental involvement in their educational activities and teacher-related factors like absence/presence of teacher shortage and the quality of teaching. To successfully negotiate the exit CEs, three strategies were dominantly employed by the research participants. First, some of them joined and/or formed reading groups with their peers, and the solving of past examination questions was a key activity in the groups. Second, nearly all the research participants participated in private/extra tutorials as part of their preparation for the exit CEs. Finally, some of the research participants took part in examination malpractices by registering for the exit CEs at special centres where examination malpractices thrived or engaging in activities that were malpractices. Experiencing and negotiating the exit CEs initiated some consequences. At the systemic level, the exit CEs prompts a high demand for private tutoring and engendered a tolerant attitude towards examination malpractices, as students subscribe to them to increase their chances of getting good grades in the exit CEs. At the individual level, the exit CEs can set in motion delays to realising one's aspiration to go onto higher education, thereby constraining some to alter their higher education preferences (course, institutional and timing). This is often triggered by grade outcomes in the exit CEs that do not satisfy the requirements for realizing their aspirations to go onto higher education. While young people can exercise their agency in how they respond to the grade outcomes, the significant other in their lives influence this agency, while

intersecting with the exit CE outcomes to shape their aspirations for higher education. For the research participants in this study, this influence appears to be different for boys and girls.

7.3 EXPERIENCING HIGH-STAKES TESTING IN A NIGERIAN CONTEXT

The experience of the exit CE is shaped by factors that are in the wider (i) Nigerian context, (ii) school context and (iii) the home context. In chapter 3, some of the factors in the wider Nigerian context that were identified include corruption (Jimoh 2009; Nnam & Otu, 2015), educational inequalities (UNESCO, 2015a) and the emphasis on the acquisition of certificates/qualifications (Dillard, 2003). Evidence of these three factors was found in this study as the secondary school leavers made references to them in both the quantitative and qualitative phase of this study. For instance, corruption in the admission process for Nigeria's higher education system was indicted by several research respondents as the reason why they were not yet in higher education. These secondary school leavers claimed that they met the requirements, but they were not admitted. For some others, their willingness to engage in examination malpractices was rationalised by a "*Nigeria is corrupt*" narrative, as expressed in the responses to the open-ended vignette items. Concerning the quest for certificates, it was a theme that featured strongly across both phases of data collection with views like "*everything in Nigeria is based on certificate*" and "*in Nigeria, in all we do, certificate is needed*". This quest for certificate shaped the high stakes that are associated with the exit CE and other examinations that need to be negotiated successfully for higher education aspirations. It is this quest for certificates that is stimulating the unintended consequences of pervasive private tutoring and unabating examination malpractices, as the literature in Chapter 2 and the current study shows. According to Bray (2003), the demand for private tutoring continues to expand in cultural contexts that stress effort, are competitive, depend on examinations, underpay teachers and provide financial benefits for it.

The quest for certificates is underpinned by an implicit acceptance/promotion of meritocracy by those who select students for higher education and people for employment. However, there have been concerns in Nigeria's media on the quality of the certificates based on the quality of the graduates who bear the certificates. Meritocracy asserts that individual merit

and hard work accounts entirely for the performance in High-stakes testing, thereby justifying its use for selection (Au, 2016). In a meritocratic environment, deficit discourses that blame students for not being selected due to failings and shortcomings on their part thrives. Evidence of these were found in the hypothetical solutions that the research respondents proffered to exit CEs dilemmas, as well as the lived experiences of the exit CE. Literature, as discussed in chapter 2, (see section 2.2.2) has shown that meritocratic ideas are problematic because of how the influence of structural inequalities is ignored in a meritocracy. Evidence of educational inequalities was found in the experiences of some of the research participants when their educational trajectory and social background were explored. Since High-stakes examinations are designed to provide reliable distinctions between students based on merit (Polesel, Leahy & Gillis, 2018), High-stakes examinations reproduce and legitimise inequalities that are present in the wider societal context (Au, 2009). Similarly, the Nigerian exit CEs reproduces and worsens the inequalities that students bring into them because they are unable to inherently take into account the disparities in people's background. However, university admissions policies can put into consideration some disadvantages that are beyond the control of the students such as physical disabilities. Although policies that are aimed at addressing structural inequalities can enable inequality. For instance, in chapter 3, the use of quotas for students from poorer regions of the country to give HE admissions further marginalises students from other regions who are already disadvantaged.

In contexts like the United States, the inequalities that students experience are related to racial/ethnic affiliations, physical and learning disabilities, socio-economic status, language deficiencies and behavioural difficulties (see Jones 2007 and Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002). Educational inequalities in the Nigerian context predominantly relate to gender, socio-economic status, regional and urban/rural differences as discussed in chapter 3 (UNESCO, 2015a). In this study, evidence of inequalities associated with gender and socioeconomic status was found. Gender determined the level of agency that can be exercised in response to exit CE outcomes while socioeconomic status dictated if both types of exit CEs will be registered for, private tutorials attended etc. These inequalities ensure that some students are relatively disempowered to produce the level of achievement and/or agency required for them to realise their aspiration to go on to higher education (Bok, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2012).

Sadly, those who are disadvantaged by inequalities tend to mostly be those that are adversely affected by the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing (Rodriguez & Arellano, 2016).

For the school context, this study found two factors – teacher shortage and teaching ineffectiveness – within schools that shape how the exit CE is experienced. In the quantitative phase, several respondents indicated a willingness not to indulge in exam malpractices if their school had good teachers. In the qualitative phase, the lack of teachers in subjects like mathematics affected the research participants' attitudes towards the subject, which in turn determined their experience of the subjects in the exit CEs. This study also found instances where schools and teachers supported or initiated exam malpractices, in the bid to increase the achievement outcomes of their students. For example, the special centres' phenomenon and instances where students (like Cyn and Jus) conspired with staff to indulge in examination malpractices. Similar trends were highlighted in the High-stakes testing chapter in chapter 2. For instance, studies like Rodriguez & Arellano (2016) and Jacob (2005) found that High-stakes testing engendered the manipulation of student classifications by schools in the United States. In the UK, teachers were found to over aid their pupils in the national assessment for KS1 and KS2 (Standards & Testing Agency 2018; 2017). In relation to the home context, this study found that the home environment of the students and parental involvement in their educational activities also shaped how the exit CE was experienced. This is an underexplored area in the High-stakes testing literature.

7.4 THE CAPACITY TO ASPIRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

To aspire is to want, prefer, desire, imagine, anticipate or hope for something (Gale & Parker, 2015). Aspirations are "*always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life*" (Appadurai 2013, p. 187), as evident in this study where research participants formed their aspirations within the interactions with their family, teachers, peers and role models. In Chapter 2, other studies such as Archer & Dewitt (2017) and Hart (2012) had similar findings, where the formation of aspirations was situated within one's social networks. The capacity to aspire is, therefore, the set of capabilities that are required to give "*meaning, substance and*

sustainability" (Appadurai 2013, p. 193) to what is aspired to. These capabilities include an understanding of the desired outcome, a knowledge of the pathway(s) to the desired outcome, previous experience of successfully negotiating pathways to desired outcomes and access to the resources that enable the navigation of the pathways (Appadurai, 2013; Bok, 2010; Prodonovich et al. 2014). This means that people can have equal aspirations but the capacity to aspire is unequally available in people; since the capacity to aspire is shaped by knowledge, experiences and resources that are unequally distributed in one's social, cultural and economic capital (Appadurai, 2013; Bok, 2010). For the young people who took part in this study, their capacity to aspire means that they have the abilities to harness the resources at their disposal to "*contest and alter the conditions*" (Appadurai 2013, p. 179) of where they were, to where they wanted to be. Some of the resources are social relationships with people who have/had (successful and unsuccessful) experience navigating the pathways to higher education, knowledge of how to negotiate these pathways, fund to handle financial requirements and educational qualifications. For instance, some respondents to the survey mentioned that they would negotiate with parents/ relatives/guardians/employers to get fund for their education, while several research participants accessed funds for their studies from extended family members (e.g. Ude, Ada and Isa).

According to Appadurai (2013), the capacity to aspire is both a cultural capacity and a navigational capacity. As a cultural capacity, it is shaped by the cultural value systems which give meaning and structure to what is acceptable, desirable and possible to achieve – that is, the good life (Appadurai 2013). Furthermore, the capacity to aspire is both innate (therefore everyone has it) and acquired (therefore it is unequally distributed but it has the potential to be strengthened or increased). Within the Nigerian context, one of the ways that the good life is framed is by the acquisition of certificates/qualifications, which should guarantee formal employment, economic mobility, material prosperity and the prestige of being educated (Dilliard, 2003). Therefore, people who are financially rich, literate in the English language, have advanced educational qualifications, are proficient with and have access to the latest technology, enjoy material comfort and possessions as well as embark on international tourism typically represents what Nigeria's cultural system portray as the good life for young people. This is partly the reason why higher education has a high premium in

the country (Okuwa, 2004), as evidenced by the increasing demand for higher education, which continues to exceed the available space for candidates (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2018). A research participant from the Qualitative phase illustrates the way that higher education has been configured into the framing of the 'good life' with the account below:

> *My role models...went after education which is the important thing. So that's why they are where they are now. The one I'm looking towards mostly is the one that is doing engineering course – electrical engineering... He has money. He has his own car, house and everything. He is comfortable...If you want to live a life that is also like that, you have to face the challenge of going to school... I saw that as the only way that I will succeed very well in life (Mas).*

Drawing on the cultural value systems within the Nigerian context, this study found that young people put into consideration the employment prospects, financial rewards and other material benefits that could be accrued from following specific pathways to inform their higher education preferences. In their study, Archer & Dewitt (2017) also found that perceived financial prospect of an aspiration informed some young people's aspirational preferences. However, there are cases where preferences are based on intrinsic benefits rather than instrumental benefits as is the case with Abi, a research participant in this study whose desire to be an English lecturer stems from her love for literature.

The capacity to aspire can also develop from cultural systems that are more universal and broader than one's immediate local context, through the influence of global media, cyber-communication and travel/migration circuits (Appadurai, 2013). In his analysis of the characteristics of cultural systems, Appadurai notes that culture has three main dimensions. First, culture involves a "*relationality...between norms, values, beliefs*, etc." (Appadurai, 2013, pp 181-182). Second, there will always be some dissension in every cultural system because not everyone will share consensus with the dominant norms. Third, cultural systems have weak boundaries as there will always be "*traffic and osmosis*" (Ibid. p. 181) between cultures, caused by globalizing factors like migration and media. Today, young people have easier access to information through the television, internet-enabled mobile phones, films, videos etc, which shares images of the good life from other cultural systems. Exposure to such

influences, therefore, expands young people's horizon of aspirations. Displaying a strong awareness of the globalising effect of digital technologies, Kam, a research participant during the qualitative phase of the study described how his aspiration to be an app developer and web designer was birthed by watching a TV interview of the founder of Facebook – Mark Zuckerberg. Thus, Television and global media became instrumental in defining his aspirations for higher education. The influence of engagement with media and current affairs on aspirations was also evident in how Isa and Ude adopted public figures as role models of what to aspire to. In the study by Archer & Dewitt (2017), they also found that Television was among the factors that shaped young people's aspirations.

As a navigational capacity, the capacity to aspire involves the use of the map of one's cultural system to navigate the pathways to the future that is aspired to; that is, "*from here to there and from now to then*" (Appadurai 2013; p. 292). Since cultural systems are a "*combination of norms, dispositions, practices, and histories*" (Ibid.), the capacity to aspire is, therefore, a capacity to navigate the complex path between cultural norms with its associated practices and the individual's aspirational wants and preferences. Within the Nigerian context, young people who aspire to go to higher education have to successfully navigate the pathways between their cultural system which demands successful negotiation of High-stakes examinations and meeting other requirements on the pathway to realizing their aspiration. In chapter 3, it was mentioned that in addition to the exit CEs, young people aspiring to higher education in the Nigerian context are expected to also successfully negotiate the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) and in some cases, the post-UTME which is administered by some HEIs has an additional screening test. The capacity to aspire further requires that one is familiar with what is aspired to, and one knows alternative pathways to realise them. The access to this type of knowledge is inherited and acquired from one's cultural system (Appadurai, 2013). The capacity to aspire is therefore weakened when one has limited access to this type of knowledge and is strengthened by increased access to this knowledge. For instance, Chi, a research participant in the qualitative phase, had an elder brother who was studying at a university. When she contemplated not registering for Mathematics at the exit CE, without realising that no university will give her admission into

her desired course without a credit grade in Mathematics, she consulted her elder brother who advised her not to do so. She described the situation thus:

> *...last week, I called my brother on phone, my senior brother. I asked him, what if I remove Maths in my course? When I asked him, he said....'Make sure you don't remove anything. If you remove Maths now …. They will not give you admission.'*

By taking advantage of the social relationship in her cultural system, she was able to acquire a useful knowledge for navigating the map of her aspiration. In another instance, her father discouraged her from sitting for the SSCE type of the exit CE because according to him, it had no value outside Nigeria. While this is not completely true, Chi was able to save the time and money she would have spent for the exam since she had excellent grades in the WASSCE that she wrote.

For those who are disadvantaged or marginalized, their access to this type of knowledge for navigating the pathways where they are (cultural norms and systems) to where they want to be (aspirational wants and preferences) is weak (Appadurai, 2013). For instance, Ada, another research participant in the qualitative phase, displayed an unawareness of the course required to realise her aspiration to become a journalist. In the life-grid, she indicated that her dream/career job while in the SS2 and SS3 class was 'Mass Communication', and it became 'Journalist' after she wrote the exit CE. According to Ada:

> *I was thinking that I would do Mass Comm, as in broadcasting -news broadcaster. I can still do that but the one that I'm good at is this journalist. So, it's after someone explained to me as in what, as in how this journalist is being done and how Mass Comm [is done]. So that's when I choose the main one that I want.*

To her, journalism and mass communication were two different university courses, which unfortunately was not the case. She was unaware that Mass Communication was the course she would need to study at a Nigerian university to become a Journalist. She also equated news broadcasting to mass communication and equated mass communication to a job rather than a course.

7.5 THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF NIGERIA'S EXIT CEs

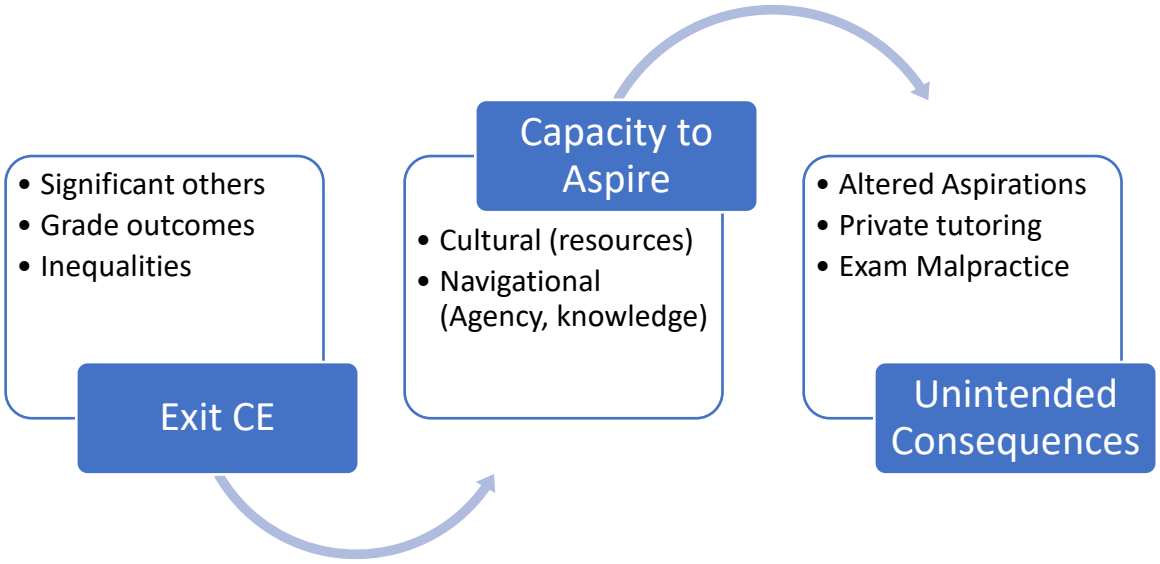
RQ3: What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?

This study found that the unintended consequences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate Examination (exit CEs), based on data generated from the views of 268 research respondents, and the lived experiences of negotiating the exit CEs by 10 research participants are:

1. Altering of higher education aspirations on a personal level
2. Examination malpractices on a systemic level and
3. exam-oriented Private Tutoring on a systemic level.

This section will focus on the altering of higher education aspirations because it specifically addresses the aim of this study, which sought to examine the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to higher education. The capacity to aspire will be used as an interpretive device to link the roles that significant others, grade outcomes and inequalities (characteristics of the exit CE experience) play in shaping the altering of higher education aspirations. Examination malpractices and private tutoring, which are systemic consequences of High-stakes testing that have already been identified in the literature, will be discussed as it relates to how secondary school leavers who are aspiring to higher education use them as strategies to realise their aspirations. Figure 16 below summarises the findings of this study.

Figure 26: The Exit CE cycle of unintended consequences



Nigeria's senior school exit CEs influence secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education through relationships with the significant 'other' in their cultural system. These significant 'other' were mainly parents, teachers and peers. As a cultural capacity, the capacity to aspire draws knowledge and experiences from the social norms, values, practices and relationships that constitute one's cultural system. In other words, the significant 'other' in one's cultural context can either enhance or detract from the knowledge and experiences that are required to strengthen the capacity to aspire. In this study, the significant 'other' influenced how young people experienced and negotiate the exit CE, in order to realize the aspiration to go onto higher education. This is evidenced by how they influenced the decision of what type of exit CE to write and how the exit CE is experienced. The significant other defined the experiences that were accessed in the home environment and expressed themselves through parental involvement. They were also encountered in the form of teacher shortage and teaching ineffectiveness. Regarding how the exit CE is negotiated, significant others also played a role in determining whether some research participants took part in examination malpractices or not and featured as peers in peer reading groups.

Most importantly, the significant other play important roles in the formation of the aspiration to go onto higher education and the altering of aspirational preferences for higher education. Literature shows that this is the case for many young people all over the world (DeJaeghere, 2018; Gale & Parker, 2015; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan, & Gale, 2015; Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002; Bok, 2010; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). The significant 'other' shape how young people imagine or discount their possible futures (Dejaeghere, 2018; Parker et al, 2013). Chi and Cyn discounted Law as a possible future because of their parents. In the responses to vignette 21 on the questionnaire, some respondents recognize that the aspiration to go onto higher education to study Mechanical Engineering could have been instigated by Effiong's parents as these quotes suggest - "*it may be possible that he wanted to be a mechanical engineer to please his parents*" and "*it must have been parental influence to study mechanical engineering*". Chi would later choose banking and finance because one of her teachers called her a banker while Cyn chose accountancy following advice from school counsellors. Counsellors and teachers are considered critical information brokers to students about higher education aspirations when guidance from other cultural or social influences are limited (Banks et al, 2010). While this can be empowering for the young person who has a limited horizon about post-secondary school options, it can also be disempowering if the 'other' define or models limited or constrained possibilities from a disadvantaged or less privileged positioning. In 'The Future as Cultural Fact', Appadurai (2013) talks about how the more privileged are more practised in exploring the future and do so more realistically. He describes the poorer members of society as having "a more brittle horizon of aspirations" (p.69) because they are less practised at conjecturing and refuting future possibilities for themselves.

Due to the significance of the 'other' in influencing the aspiration to go onto higher education, it can be speculated that they indirectly contribute to strengthening a student's commitment to complete secondary school education to fulfil their aspiration to go onto higher education. When students begin senior secondary school, it is with an awareness that the aspiration to go onto higher education can only materialize after successfully negotiating the exit CE. This is where agency comes in, young people have to exercise their agency on the pathway to realising their aspirations. In the quantitative data findings for this study, 62% of 263

respondents did not consider the exit CEs as a factor that encourages dropping out of secondary school. Considering that all the questionnaire respondents were aspiring to go onto higher education, one can safely assume that they understood that the exit CE must be successfully negotiated to realize the HE aspirations. Dropping out of secondary school would, therefore, mean that implicit or explicit consent had been granted by the significant 'others' in their lives. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that social networks influence decisions by how it commands allegiance from its members. According to him, social groups like families are institutionalized forms of social capital and has boundaries which each member must protect (Bourdieu, 1986). The members also have obligations to reproduce useful relationships that affirm group competence and avoid compromising ones that put group reputation at stake (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, the students would likely put into consideration what their significant 'other' supported and, possibly, also how such aspirations would improve the welfare of the whole social group. The choice to, therefore, finish secondary school would be seen as preservation and advancement of the family social status and family consultations will not be overlooked by the students before such decision are made. To make these choices, many young people exercise their agency in that regard.

Secondly, in a context like Nigeria where meritocracy is an implicitly/explicitly accepted policy, the exit CEs influence secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education through the nature of the grade outcomes that are experienced in it. As a navigational capacity, the capacity to aspire entail the use of the knowledge and experiences that were acquired from one's cultural system, to navigate the pathway from where one is to where they want to be in the future. For young people who aspire to higher education in the Nigerian context, the exit CE is an important pathway to the aspirations for higher education that must be successfully navigated. To do so, students must obtain satisfactory grade outcomes that meet the requirements for their course and institutional preferences in higher education. For those who obtain satisfactory grades in the exit CE, their capacity to aspire is further strengthened, having successfully navigated this particular aspirational node. They can, therefore, utilize the knowledge and experience obtained from this successful navigation to confront other aspirational nodes such as the UTME.

However, for those who do not obtain satisfactory grades in the exit CE, their navigational capacities to aspire are weakened. This sets in motion a cycle of "*exploration and trial*" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 188), where students attempt to strengthen their capacity to aspire, by either rewriting the exit CEs/ its alternatives or altering their Higher Education preferences as it relates to timing, course and/or institution The main consequence of this period of 'exploration and trial' is the delay it constitutes to academic progression for those who have to rewrite the exit CEs/its alternatives. For those who choose to alter their higher education preferences in some form, the delay to academic progression can still affect them. For instance, Cyn once altered her aspiration from accountancy to entrepreneurship to increase her chance of getting HE admission. She planned to do a change of course in her 200 level back to accountancy. Unfortunately, she still wasn't granted admission. The capacity to aspire develops and thrives by experiences - experiences that provide them opportunities to practice, repeat, explore, speculate and refute the pathways between aspirations and outcomes, as well as previous experience of successful navigations (Gale & Parker, 2015). An experience like the one above will weaken Cyn's capacity to realize her aspiration for higher education.

Since those who are better off financially, materially etc. have more of the successful kinds of experiences where they frequently use their capacity to aspire, their capacity to aspire is more developed (Appadurai, 2013). For instance, young people who come from wealthy homes are more likely to have previous and realistic experiences of successfully navigating the pathway between what they want and what they get. On the other hand, those who are disadvantaged or marginalized often lack the opportunities to practice the use of their capacity to aspire in this way. This lack of opportunities weakens their horizon of aspirations and ensures that the capacity to aspire does not develop. The horizon of aspirations refers to the range of pathways and options for realizing aspirational wants and preferences. Although the diminishing of the horizon of aspirations can be a good thing in the sense that it makes the task of selecting reasonable options easier (since too many options can be confusing and demanding), it is disempowering because the students did not voluntarily exercise their agency to make that

choice themselves. This is why when unsatisfactory outcomes are experienced in the exit CE, the capacity to aspire is weakened because it diminishes one's horizon of aspirations, as evidenced by how young people alter their preferences for higher education in this study.

The altering of higher education aspirations in some form - changing course preference, institutional preference or even suspending higher education pursuits whether temporarily or permanently – seem to be linked to an unwillingness to invest more time that delays academic progression. For students who experience unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CE and are aspiring to higher education, the time investment had greater ramifications. Extra year(s) will be required to prepare and write another exit CE or its alternatives and write the entrance examination(s) for higher education institutions. The unwillingness to pay the price of extra time for some students stem from how it would also require additional money and effort in tandem, as well as the uncertainty surrounding future examination outcomes. In both the quantitative and qualitative data from this study, it was considered a **waste** of time by some research participants to persist in trying to realize their original aspirations because it led to a delay in one's academic progression. This would culminate in a delay to the conversion of the investments associated with accumulating that cultural capital to economic capital (that is the conversion of educational qualification to money through employment etc). Hence, they exercise their agency to alter their aspirations in some way so that reinvestment of extra time (and money, effort) is avoided.

Another likely reason behind the preference or decision to alter aspiration is the type of knowledge that the students have access to. According to de Certeau's (1984) conceptualisation of 'tour' and 'map' knowledges cited in Gale and Parker (2015); students' with 'tour' knowledge of their aspirations have vague understandings of what they aspire to. Consequently, they are quick to alter their aspirations when they encounter any obstacle. On the other hand, those who have 'map' knowledges of their aspirations are more familiar with their desired aspiration, so that rather than changing the desired aspiration when obstacles are encountered, they change the pathway to the aspired end. Gale and Parker (2015) had analysed the Aspirational data of Australian students in years 8-10 aged 13 - 15. This

possession of ‘tour’ or ‘map’ knowledge might explain why there were some Nigerian students who chose to hold onto their previous higher education preferences even after falling short of the required grades, in the current study. This meant that they had to rewrite the exit CEs. The sample in the Kruger et al. (2016) study that was described in chapter 2 exhibited similar tendencies as they had repeatedly failed the High School Exit Exam in the United States, but continued to rewrite it because of the value of that certificates in their State at the time.

For some young people, however, having to alter aspiration was a temporary alternative route towards their aspired end. For instance, in the quantitative data, respondents disclosed that they would choose another course with which to gain entry into higher education. Then, switch into their desired course by the second year. In the qualitative data, Ame sought admission into a polytechnic instead of a university, with the intent of switching back to the university subsequently through the Direct entry programme. Ame had relied on a significant other in his social relationships to make this happen. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful at the time of data collection. The primary aspiration for these young people is to obtain educational qualifications that would provide access to employment opportunities or economic mobility. Therefore, altering their preferences for higher education in some way does not really affect their primary aspiration to obtain qualifications. Under such circumstances, altering the preferences for higher education could be a way to strengthen their capacity to aspire.

To avoid unsatisfactory outcomes in the exit CEs, students exercised their agency to employ strategies like subscribing to special Centres (where examination malpractices thrived), engaging in exam-oriented private tutoring and participating in peer reading groups. These strategies strengthen the capacity to navigate the pathways towards realizing their aspirations for higher education, by helping to increase the chances of satisfactory grade outcomes. According to Appadurai (2013), people can take advantage of the resources around them to “*contest and alter the conditions*” (p. 179) of where they are, to where they aspire to be. Those who are better off would usually have opportunities associated with their

privilege such as attending good schools, being taught by good teachers, parental support as well as knowledge and experiences in their social relationships. On the other hand, those who are less advantaged, take advantage of the resources that exist (which takes advantage of their disadvantages) such as private tutoring and special centres (examination malpractices). The willingness to alter the aspiration to go onto higher education in some way was also a way for young people to strengthen their capacity to aspire when unsatisfactory outcomes have been experienced in the exit CEs.

Considering all these analyses, this study concludes that the Nigerian exit CEs create a constraining environment for young people's capacity to navigate the pathways to realising their aspirations for higher education. By constraints, we mean limitations on how far and how well young people can exercise their agency to realise their HE aspirations. Secondary school leavers' capacities to navigate the pathways to their aspirations for higher education is influenced in part by how they experience High-stakes examinations like the exit CEs. How the exit CE is experienced is dependent on the significant others in the lives of the secondary school leavers, the nature of the grade outcomes in the exit CE and the way it reproduces inequalities in the wider society. In worst-case scenarios, if significant others do not add value to the knowledge and experiences that the secondary school leavers need to navigate the pathways to their aspirations if unsatisfactory grade outcomes are experienced in the exit CE, and if they are disadvantaged in any way, then the opportunities and pathways at the secondary school leavers' disposal for navigating towards aspirations is very limited. Appadurai (2013) describes this as having "*a more brittle horizon of aspirations*" (p. 189).

To understand how the exit CEs creates a constraining environment, one must first recognize that the exit CE is inherently biased against those who do not obtain satisfactory grade requirements for higher education, irrespective of the fact that this might be due to circumstances beyond their control such as educational disadvantages and unfavourable examination conditions. Second, the gatekeeping function of the exit CE to select students for selection into higher education, based on meritocracy, is not infallible. Aside from the criticisms surrounding how meritocracy does not consider structural inequalities, contextual

issues like examination malpractices distort the interpretations given to exam grades. Therefore, the grade outcomes in the exit CE are not accurate representations of the abilities of examination candidates who have indulged in examination malpractices without been caught. Third, the experience of High-stakes examination generally and the Nigerian exit CE specifically is a product of the home and systemic frameworks in the schools and the Nigerian societal context. Consequently, it is problematic to address the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing through the lens of individual deficit rather than a systemic deficit. Finally, if the stakes associated with the exit CE continues to be high for young people, the unintended consequences of the exit CE will continue to evolve, sometimes in unanticipated ways.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter set out to address the research aim of this study which was to explore the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for secondary school leavers aspiring to higher education. The third research question which asked: *What are the unintended consequences of the exit CEs for secondary school leavers who are aspiring to go onto higher education, as inferred from their perceptions and lived experiences of the exit CEs?* informed the discussion. This study identified the altering of the aspiration for higher education on a personal level, as well as examination malpractices and private tutoring as the unintended consequences of the exit CE in the Nigerian context at the systemic level. Focusing on the unintended consequence that is personal to the secondary school leavers who is aspiring to higher education; that is, the altering of HE aspirations in some way, this chapter argues that the exit CEs create a constraining environment for young people's capacity to aspire to higher education through; its reproduction of social and educational inequalities, the influence of significant others on the experience and negotiation of the exit CEs, as well as the nature of grade outcomes from the exit CEs. In the next chapter, the contribution of this study to knowledge will be discussed, as well as the implications of its findings, limitations and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This study, which adds to existing literature and research on High-stakes testing, explored the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for secondary school leavers in Awka, Anambra State, South-East Nigeria who were aspiring to higher education, based on their perceptions and lived experiences of Nigeria's senior school exit Certificate Examinations (exit CEs). The study began on the premise that all the research participants/respondents had aspirations to go onto higher education because they were preparing for the entrance exam into Nigeria's HEIs at the time that data collection occurred. Drawing guidance from hermeneutic phenomenology as its philosophical framework, a Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) design informed data collection and analysis, while Appadurai's (2013) theorisation of the Capacity to Aspire was used to frame the interpretation from the findings. This study contributes to knowledge in the field of High-stakes testing, by extending what is known about the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing, in relation to the Nigerian context and higher education aspirations. In this chapter, this study's contributions to existing knowledge, implications of findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed. The chapter ends with a reflective account of the research process and experience.

8.2 ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

This study adds empirical evidence from the Nigerian context to the growing research on the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing, with a focus on the testing at the crucial transition phase from secondary to higher education. In the Literature, the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing have been comprehensively researched in contexts that have been tagged 'developed countries' such as the United States and the United Kingdom. However, in contexts which have been labelled 'developing countries', the ways that High-stakes testing impacts on the educational system, policies and practices remain under-researched. In Nigeria particularly, the lack of methodological rigour and critical

interpretations of research findings, the preponderance of claims about educational issues based on presumptions rather than on research evidence, the apathy of the Nigerian government towards young people who are not in mainstream education and the non-inclusion of the voices of young people in educational issues that affect them, makes the contributions of this study significant (refer to section 1.2.2 and chapter 3). These contributions are subsequently discussed under the subsections – Methods and knowledge.

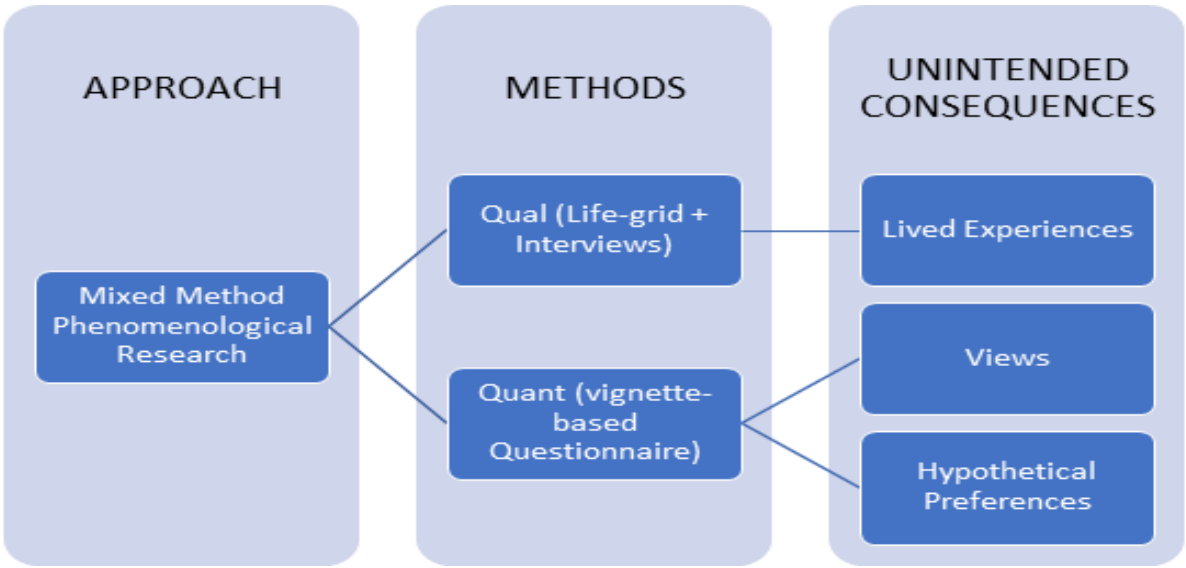
8.2.1 Method

The first contribution of this study is the inclusion of the voices of young people who have experienced High-stakes testing in the debates on the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing, using a Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR) design. This was a gap in existing research because current literature emphasized the impact that High-stakes testing had on educational providers, practices, and policies; based on the voices of those doing the testing rather than those being tested. One of the problems of not including the voices of those affected by an issue in the debates surrounding that issue is the tendency for their realities and interests to be undermined (Felding, 2003). To address the gap, this study explored the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing from the perspectives and experiences of those who have passed through High-stakes testing. This study has also shown how MMPR, as conceptualized by Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie (2014, 2015), can be effectively applied to High-stakes testing research. The philosophical underpinnings of Phenomenology mean that it is more amenable to the use of qualitative methods for data collection, because of the need to give priority to the experiences of the participant as consciously lived. To address this concern, this study prioritized the data collection from the qualitative phase by administering it first and using the findings from the qualitative phase to inform the design of a vignette-based questionnaire for the quantitative phase.

The use of a vignette-based questionnaire which required open-ended responses about the preferences that respondents would make in hypothetical scenarios meant that lived experience was focused on, albeit vicariously. Sadi and Basit (2017) had successfully used a vignette-based questionnaire to investigate cultural tolerance, a sensitive topic amongst

female Omani students. The experience of a High-stakes examination can be a sensitive topic, especially for those who have performed poorly in them and those who have been negatively impacted by their experience of it. The use of vignettes, therefore, enabled the study to obtain the views of young people about it by depersonalizing negative experiences of the exit CEs for the research respondents. One of the limitations that have been attributed to the use of vignette is how it may not capture people's behaviour in real-life situations (Sadi & Basit, 2017). However, this same limitation also applies to any other quantitative tool like the use of Likert-type questions. Using the vignettes the way that it was used in this study, therefore, offered this study the opportunity to obtain evidence from a relatively large sample about the array of options and possibilities that young people in the Nigerian context could see when they encountered challenges in their experiences of the exit CE. With this, this study obtained comprehensive evidence about the perceived consequences of High-stakes testing within the Nigerian context. Figure 17 below illustrates how the MMPR design informed data collection.

Figure 27: MMPR design for data collection



8.2.2 Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge on the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing for young people aspiring to higher education, an under-researched topic in the international literature and the Nigerian context specifically. It adds to the understanding of the two-way

interaction between young people's examination outcomes at the senior secondary level and their HE aspirations in the Nigerian context. It further develops insights into how young people draw on the 'other' such as family networks and role models, as well as the media as sources of information to navigate the pathway from their outcomes in the exit CEs to their aspirations for higher education. On a personal level, this study provides empirical evidence of how High-stakes testing can trigger young people to alter their preferences for Higher education in some ways. While the common options were to change course and institutional preferences, there were instances when the experience of a High-stakes examination sets in motion the decision to suspend an aspiration to go to higher education temporarily, and in some cases, permanently. The decision to alter higher education preferences is rationalized by a desire to avoid delay in educational progression because this delay has financial and emotional implications for secondary school leavers. On a systemic level, this study provides support to existing literature that highlights how High-stakes testing creates the conditions that engender private tutoring and examination malpractices. This study also extends existing critiques of meritocratic selection into HEIs by showing how private tutoring and examination malpractices distorts the ideals of fairness that underpin meritocracy since they reproduce disadvantage and undermine the trustworthiness of Nigeria's examination system. This is in addition to the perceived unpredictability and unreliability of the administration of examinations, which also undermines the myth of objectivity, another underpinning ideal of meritocracy.

Furthermore, this study drew on Appadurai's (2013) conception of 'the capacity to aspire' to show how Nigeria's exit Certificate Examinations can create a constraining environment for secondary school leavers' capacities to realize their aspirations for higher education; through how it reproduces structural inequalities, the impact of significant others on the experience of the exit CE, and the grade outcomes from the experience of the exit CE. This study provides empirical support for Appadurai's (2013) theorization of the uneven distribution of the capacity to aspire, by illustrating the differential cultural capacities of knowledge and experiences of research participants, which also differentially impact on their capacity to navigate the pathways to their aspirations. The current study, therefore, developed useful insights on how young people exercised their agency, in negotiation with family members

whom they were often dependent on and employed private tutoring and examination malpractices as strategies to realise their aspirations for higher education. Finally, the discussion of the findings from the study helped to interrogate the deficit views that are held about private tutoring and examination malpractices in literature. The social and educational inequalities that characterise the experience of many students through the complicity of the wider Nigerian society, schools and the home suggest that holding individual students solely responsible for their outcomes in the exit CEs is problematic.

8.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings from this study have implications for the practice of High-stakes testing in the Nigerian context and further research on High-stakes testing. They are discussed in the sub-sections below.

8.3.1 Redefining the Meritocratic ideals of selection into Nigeria's HEIs

The principle of merit is important. However, the way that it is currently defined for secondary school students aspiring to higher education in the Nigerian context needs to be redefined and justly implemented. First, the agencies and Higher education institutions (HEIs) in charge of awarding admission to young people aspiring to higher education need to be transparent about their selection process. It is worrisome to note that many secondary school leavers in this study felt cheated because they insist that they meet the requirements for being admitted but are still not offered places into Nigeria's HEIs. When applicants are not admitted, they should be given reasons why through the same means/platforms that they notify them of their scores in the entrance exams for Nigeria's HEIs (UTME/post-UTME). This will help young people to be more strategic about how to increase their capacity to navigate the requirements for being admitted. Again, the Nigerian government and other relevant stakeholders in higher education must be committed to minimise or eradicate the corrupt practices that have been indicted in the selection process into Nigeria's HEIs.

Second, some of the admission policies that are inherently putting some students at a disadvantage need to be revised. An example of this is the Quota system that was discussed in chapter 3 (see section 3.3), which is aimed at empowering the disadvantaged in the selection process into Nigeria's HEIs. Scholars like Joshua et al. (2014) and Adeyemi (2001) have suggested a revision in the percentage of allocations in ways that those who deserve to be admitted based on merit, are not disadvantaged by a policy that aims to address educational disadvantages. However, as noted in chapter 2, the notion of merit is subjective because "*individuals are not born with or without merit; it is ascribed to them*" by the politically and ideologically powerful (Crawford, 2010, p. 11). The implication of this is that the idea of meritocracy continues to mask and /or produce inequality, rather than address it by making success and failure an individual responsibility while ignoring the role of structural inequalities. Evidence of this abounds in the Nigerian society because those who are not privileged or as the local parlance say – '*do not have connection'* – continue to be disadvantaged in the selection process.

The way forward, therefore, lies in redefining the meritocratic ideals that underpin the selection process, to broadly reflect talents and abilities that are beyond what High-stakes examinations presently assess. The status quo where outcomes in High-stakes examinations like the exit CEs are the only criteria that define a candidate who merits higher education is inadequate. A selection tool that can be exploited is the use of portfolio assessment, although this comes with its peculiar measurement challenges of standardisation and comparability, as well as its vulnerability to malpractices. However, an education system that is determined and committed to genuinely provide young people with equal meritorious chances that is sensitive to their unequal backgrounds will seek ways to make it work, while addressing potential loopholes for exam malpractices. Another way to redefine the meritocratic ideals that underpin the selection into Nigeria's HEIs is to make it more inclusive of different types of students. Currently, the quota system that was previously mentioned accommodates students who are disadvantaged by geographical location only. However, the quota policy is not direct about those disadvantaged by disabilities, although individual HEIs take that into account when making selections. They, however, focus on physical/visible disabilities and no

provision is made for those with learning disabilities like Autism and Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This needs to change to reflect current realities in the 21st century.

Third, there is an urgent need to reduce the number of secondary school leavers who are negatively affected by meritocratic selections, by expanding the capacities of HEIs to accommodate more students and provide them with quality education. The United Nations' 2015 sustainable development goal for education, which Nigeria also adopted strives to "*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*" by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). To avoid lip service to this declaration, the Nigerian government needs to support HEIs deliberately and determinedly to increase their carrying capacity. For a start, its budgetary allocation to education yearly needs to be at least 15% of the national budget, as recommended by UNESCO for 'developing' countries (UNESCO, 2015; Adedigba, 2017). There have been agitations by different stakeholders for the government to increase budgetary allocations to the education sector, but this has unfortunately continued to be ignored (Ameh & Aluko, 2019; Sahara reporters, 2019). Although new public universities are being created and the Government is giving approvals for the establishment of private institutions, these efforts are grossly inadequate especially when existing universities are not properly resourced and maintained (Nyewusira, 2014).

Furthermore, the Nigerian Government could also consider diversifying into public-private partnerships to expand access into higher education (Adu, Adepoju & Oyeola, 2019). One way to do this will be partnering with foreign institutions and governments to make higher education accessible to young Nigerians. It is however important to highlight that higher education abroad can only be afforded by those who are more privileged, except if those who are less privileged have access to scholarships. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government does not give loan or aid to students who need it, although there are bursaries administered by some state governments and private organizations. These bursaries remain largely inadequate and competitive considering the number of young people who want them.

Therefore, the Nigerian government must explore how they can partner with financial institutions to give loans to willing students and allow them to pay back gradually as you have in the UK and the US. Implementation will be an arduous task, but the right people can lead this initiative to successful fruition.

8.3.2 Empowering Young People to reject Examination Malpractices

High-stakes examinations can trigger young people to become competitive individuals who define their self-worth based on their performance in the examinations and the certificates/qualifications that they acquire (Reay & Wiliams, 1999). Since the Nigerian society attaches prestige to the achievement of certificates/qualifications, this puts increased value on the examinations that yield the certificates, and many would go to any length to ensure success at these examinations (Agbodeka, 2002). Therefore, if the wider Nigerian context places a high premium on the acquisition of qualifications/certificates, the attempt to address the challenge of examination malpractices through narrow punitive and preventive measures will be largely unsuccessful. One of the narrow punitive measures was the enactment of the Examination Malpractice Act 33 of 1999 by the federal Government which specified punishments of jail term and cash fines for those who indulge in examination malpractices[4]. This has not deterred or abated examination malpractices (Onyibe, Uma & Ibina, 2015). Another narrow punitive measure is the delisting of schools that are discovered to be special centres because of their involvement in examination malpractices (e.g. Ajaja, 2019). However, the examination agencies are unable to capture all such schools since they continue to find new and sophisticated ways to evade being caught.

The narrow preventive measures include the use of digital technologies to detect malpractices. For instance, WAEC introduced software called Item Differential Profile to detect collusion cases in objective tests in 2019 (WAEC, 2019). Another example is the registration for the 2020 UTME, where the exam agency (JAMB) mandated candidates to register for the entrance examination into higher education using their National Identity Number (NIN). The JAMB Registrar claimed that doing so would curb registration infractions that lead to examination malpractices (Aluko, 2019). However, the use of NIN for registration

was eventually suspended because many students could not get the NIN before the registration deadline. These measures, while commendable in themselves are strengthened by the deficit views that are held about examination malpractices as things that young people do because they are deficient in putting effort or cannot pass the exams. It is important to realize that young people's decisions to participate in examination malpractices are not necessarily to get "undue advantage or undeserved grade" (Onyema et al. 2015, p.13) than it is to simply get the grades that they need to access higher education while they save their time, money and their dignity. Hence, the problem with these narrow punitive and preventive measures is how they are designed to address the symptoms rather than the causes of the malady.

This study has argued that young people see examination malpractices as a tool for strengthening their capacity to aspire. This, therefore, means that the measures that will successfully tackle examination malpractices must offer young people alternative ways to strengthen their capacity to aspire. Government, parents, schools, teachers, examination agencies and other stakeholders should be asking - how can we strengthen the capacity to aspire of young people or how do we prevent young people from finding examination malpractices attractive for strengthening their capacity to aspire? The question should NOT be how should we punish young people who engage in malpractices or how do we detect young people who engage in malpractices or how do we prevent young people from being successful at attempting to engage in malpractices?

These young people observe historical antecedents of people around them not getting satisfactory outcomes. For instance, Ame talked about how he was advised to switch to special centres (where examination malpractices thrived) because of the historical antecedents of his school where the previous two sets of graduating students did not "*make their exam*", so he was advised to register in another school. What are the systemic antecedents crippling the beliefs of young people about being able to pass High-stakes exams without malpractices? Some young people who responded to the vignette on examination malpractices note that if their school had good teachers, they would not consider examination

malpractices. The focus must shift from narrow punitive and preventive measures to broad empowering measures. Measures that empower young people to have confidence in their capacity to successfully navigate the pathway to their aspirations. Schools must be equipped with good teachers. Parents/Guardians must get involved in helping their children/wards learn better in schools. The home environment must become more supportive of young people preparing for exams. Examination questions must move from the demand for factual recall to questions that demand comprehension, analysis and synthesis; while the syllabus by examination agencies must be limited to cover topics that can be reasonably and adequately covered within two and half years.

Second, the Nigerian society needs to continue the ongoing effort to desensitise and de-emphasise the acquisition of certificates/qualifications, while addressing the prevailing unemployment challenges in the country. Otherwise, the stakes associated with the exit CE will continue to be relevant in the nearest future because of the high premium on acquiring certificates, which has led to "*qualification escalation' (a steady rise in the qualifications required for any particular job), or 'qualification inflation' (a steady fall in the job-getting value of any particular level of qualification*" (Dore, 1997, p. 25). The recent push for entrepreneurship as a route towards self-employment against the background of increasing unemployment is commendable (Folarin, 2019; Ojerinde, 2019; Onuba, 2019a, 2019b). Unfortunately, the Nigerian society is also weakening the capacity of young people to thrive as young entrepreneurs, through the establishment of Government policies that do not support small and medium enterprises (e.g. unfriendly tax policies), poor infrastructural facilities (e.g. electricity), endemic corruption in the wider society, lack of access to financial grants and a weak judicial system (Ezeani & Ugwu, 2013; Onyeka Ofili, 2014; Okeke & Eme, 2014).

However, not everyone aspires to be entrepreneurs or have the expertise/skill set to be successful entrepreneurs. This means that the acquisition of certificates/qualifications will still be important for many. For this category of people, it is important to strengthen the value

of equivalent and alternative certificates. The Nigerian government is increasing the number of institutions that are established or permitted to offer Technical and Vocational Education/Training to accommodate the teeming number of post-secondary school applicants (National Board for Technical Education, 2019). Unfortunately, the Universities continue to be the most/only preferred higher education institutions for many young people, to the detriment of other veritable options like the Polytechnics, Monotechnics, College of Education and other specialised institutions. If need be, the course offerings of these alternatives must be expanded so that they can accommodate the yearnings of young people for higher education with certificates that are valued. But most importantly, the government must deliberately engage in partnerships and collaborations that will create more employment for young people. The country must be made conducive for investors through attention to infrastructural development. Examination malpractice is not an isolated malady. It is a reproduction of the different forms of problems and corruption in the wider Nigerian, home, and school context.

8.3.3 Combating Teacher shortage and ineffective teaching

Teacher shortage and teaching ineffectiveness were found to be part of the lived experiences of young people in this study. The need to ensure that schools do not lack the teachers that are required to help pupils/students learn cannot be overemphasised. Presently, the teaching profession is unattractive to many people in the Nigerian context because of the low remuneration and welfare packages (Akinduyo, 2014; Okuwa, 2004; Omoruyi & Osunde, 2005). In the Subair & Talabi (2015) study, teacher shortage was attributed to the low earnings and working conditions of the profession as well as high student enrolment. No country can grow beyond its education system. It is therefore important for the concerns and agitations of teachers to be addressed, while the profession's earnings should be increased. Educationists in the Ministries who are underutilised should be seconded to schools. A scheme like the TeachforNigeria[14], which recruits young people aged below 35 to teach in underserved communities and school for two years, should be supported and encouraged.

[14] Please see https://teachfornigeria.org/ for details about the scheme.

The need for support and beneficial partnerships for schools in the rural areas and geopolitical zones that have historical antecedents of being marginalised is also crucial.

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

First, this study can only provide tentative evidence regarding the question of whether the High-stakes exit CE is an effective screening mechanism for young people aspiring to higher education. Based on the study's limited sample size and characteristics, the weaknesses of the exit CEs for meritocratic selection into HEIs have been highlighted. A holistic investigation that incorporates the views and experiences of other stakeholders like the higher education sector, examination councils, schools and teachers will further be required to draw informed conclusions about the continued use of High-stakes testing like the exit CEs. Furthermore, the consequential validity of the examinations, which is beyond the scope of this study, would also have to be analysed to draw that conclusion. Secondly, the instruments that were used to collect data were limited in some ways. For instance, although the self-developed vignette-based questionnaire was face-validated by drawing on previous research, piloting, and doing further revisions; it might be further improved by checking for content validity using a panel of expert judges and probably checking for internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha (Tsang, Royse & Terkawi, 2017). Furthermore, the methodology used in this study did not allow for exploring intersectionality, such as how aspirations, the capacity to aspire, unsatisfactory examination outcomes and the significant 'other' interacted with gender, socioeconomic status etc, despite that the research findings indicate some level of interaction.

Thirdly, the findings from this study cannot be generalised to all the young people aspiring to higher education in Anambra State specifically and in Nigeria generally. This is because Nigeria has a wide range of diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, age, geographical locations, urban versus rural spaces, which therefore add nuances to young people's individual differences. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this study to capture this diversity. However, a level of generalisability can be claimed for some of the highlighted issues. For instance, findings related to examination malpractices and exam-oriented private tutoring can be generalised

to all the States in Nigeria and some African countries (see section 2.4.4), while findings on the importance of family networks can be generalised across many countries because of how it finds support in the existing literature. Again, the high ratio of demand to supply for places in higher education features in a few African countries, although for some countries, the main bottleneck comes earlier at transitions into secondary schools. Therefore, those who are knowledgeable about High-stakes examinations and aspirations in other countries may be able to extrapolate the insights from this study to their contexts.

Fourthly, this study was limited to the views and experiences of two types of the exit CEs, that is, the WASSCE that is administered by WAEC and the SSCE that is administered by NECO. Other kinds of the exit CE such as the National Technical Certificate Examination, National Business Certificate Examination and the National Vocational Certificate Examination (FGN, 2013) were beyond the scope of this study. Again, this PhD study was limited in resources and time; hence, did not have enough time to engage with the research participants/respondents comprehensively because they were preparing for another High-stakes examination at the time of data collection. The ethical implications of collecting data anywhere else outside the venue for the private tutorials meant that data could only be collected at the venue where they received their tutorials. Therefore, the improvised and short timings for collecting data may have interfered with collecting in-depth or comprehensive data. Fifthly, although individual agency is evident in the way that the exit CEs shapes the aspiration to go onto higher education, this study could not theorise its role because Appadurai does not adequately tackle this in his conception of the capacity to aspire, unfortunately. Finally, this study could not generate statistical inferences about particular views and preferences in the quantitative survey data. Descriptive statistics were used to capture the range of views because of the use of a research design that was more focused on the lived experiences of High-stakes testing.

8.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

This study does not address all the relevant questions that can enrich our understandings about the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing and has therefore left room for

further research. First, because young people aspiring to higher education in Nigeria must also successfully negotiate the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (the entry exam into HEIs), research that explores the unintended consequences of experiencing the UTME may contribute to further knowledge about the unintended consequences of High-stakes testing. Secondly, although this research identified the role of individual agency in how High-stakes testing mediates unintended consequences, and studies like Dejaeghere (2018) have also done similarly, further research is needed to theorise the interplay between individual agency and aspirations especially as it relates to how they initiate unintended consequences of High-stakes testing. Again, further research can explore the use of a longitudinal study to provide a more robust understanding of the unintended consequences of High-stakes examinations by looking at the experiences of young people after their aspirations to go to higher education have been realised or not. Then, there is the need for empirical research that explores the intersectionality between the capacity to aspire following unsatisfactory examination outcomes and gender, socioeconomic status etc. A methodology that will be more sensitive to this intersectionality will be needed for this kind of research. Finally, there is a dearth of studies that have explored the higher education aspirations of young people in the Nigerian context. This is an area of study that will be useful to explore for further understandings about young people in the Nigerian context.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

A lot has happened between starting and completing the PhD, which has shaped the direction and duration of the PhD process for me. I began the study with presumptions about the ways that High-stakes testing is presupposed to affect young people who were aspiring to higher education. I, however, ended the study with an appreciation of the rationale for High-stakes testing, an ambivalence about its meritocratic ideals and empathy for the young people who had to successfully negotiate them. This means that I am not anti-High-stakes testing because I appreciate the important role they play in a context like Nigeria where examinations are the cheap and practical instruments for selection and certification. However. I contend that the way that schooling is experienced, which shapes and is shaped by how High-stakes testing is practised, disenfranchises many students from realising their higher education aspirations,

through no fault of theirs. This is why I end the thesis by supporting Stobart (2008) proposal for the focus to be on how " *to improve, rather than abandon*" High-stakes testing in terms of its "*purpose, fitness-for-purpose and consequences criteria*" (p. 101). However, the notion of 'improvement' is a subjective term. Therefore, every context must define and adopt the improvement that is most sensitive and beneficial to their education system. On a personal level, I now have clarity about my aspiration to support disadvantaged young people as I mentioned in section 1.2.3. My charity / NGO will focus on the improvement of secondary school students' achievement outcomes in Mathematics, English Language and ICT through volunteering, in order to strengthen young people's capacities to realise their higher education aspirations. Furthermore, this PhD study has shown me how education systems can reproduce the inequalities that they are designed to tackle, and this has huge implications on how High-stakes testing is experienced.

Taking a retrospective look at the research process itself, there are things I would have done differently. First, I would have conducted the study using qualitative methods only, which would have allowed me to collect lived experiences from more research participants. There is so much to glean from young people's lived experiences, and they are willing to speak up. I am convinced that it is important to feedback people's experiences of these High-stakes examinations into the policies that define how they are used. Unfortunately, the limitations of the study as it currently is, means that the findings cannot be said to be representative of the experiences of many young people. Secondly, rather than focus on how High-stakes testing shaped the aspiration to go onto higher education, I would have done either of two things. First, focused on how young people negotiated all the necessary High-stakes examinations for realising the aspiration to go to higher education. Or I would have just focused on exploring the complexities surrounding the formation and negotiation of higher education aspirations in relation to social/economic mobility within the Nigerian context, and in comparison, to other contexts. However, I acknowledge that these insights are coming in hindsight because of the knowledge and experience that I have acquired from successfully negotiating the research aims that this study set out to do. I therefore also recommend what I would have done differently as suggestions for further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research Participants' Information Sheet for The Qualitative Phase

Research Participants' Information Sheet

The purpose of this information sheet is to inform you about the aims of the research and explain the researcher's role and your role if you agree to be a participant.

Research Title: *The Consequences of Poor Academic Performance in High-Stakes Examinations: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Nigeria's Secondary School Leavers*

Researcher: The research will be conducted by Ms. Jane Nebe, a PhD student at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK, and will contribute to her PhD Thesis.
Research Aim: This research aims to explore how examination outcomes affect secondary school leavers' educational trajectory into higher education. This will help us understand the significance of examinations in the lives of young people and guide informed recommendations on how best to support secondary school leavers with their educational aspirations.
Research expectations from you: Complete a life-grid session and respond to a free-writing task or semi-structured interview, in a first meeting that will last for an hour. Then, participate in another interview at a second meeting that will last for an hour. Venue and time depends on you.
Do you have to take part? No. Participation is entirely voluntary.
What do you benefit? This research will provide an opportunity for you to tell your story and contribute to knowledge that may help other young people.

If you agree now, can you change your mind later? Yes. You can withdraw from the research at any time. You do not need to give any reasons, if you change your mind.

What about your privacy and confidentiality? Your identity and anything that can identify you will be kept confidential. Your contribution to the research will be kept anonymous. The information that you provide will be securely saved on a password-encrypted laptop.

Is the Research approved. Yes. The University of Bristol, UK has given me ethical approval to conduct the research.

What will happen to the Research findings? The completed Thesis will be held at the University of Bristol's library. There will be journal publications and conference presentations where the research findings will be disseminated. For some participants, an excerpt of what they say may be selected as key quotations to provide relevant evidence or illustrate an issue highlighted by the research, but it will be done anonymously. These quotations may be included in written reports or other publicly available texts such as journal articles, books, conference presentations.

How do you participate? Sign the consent form that says you are happy to take part in the research and to be audio recorded. You must be 18 years old already and must have completed senior secondary school. You must have written WAEC and/or NECO Senior Certificate Examinations and must have seen your result(s) as well.

Do you need more information before you decide? Please contact me in person or through my email address - jn14126@bristol.ac.uk . If you have any concerns, you can contact my supervisor – **Professor Sally Thomas** through this email address - s.thomas@bristol.ac.uk .
Thank you.
Ms. Jane Nebe
PhD Student
Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK.

PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM
(To be completed by the Participant and returned to the researcher)

Research Title - The Consequences of Poor Academic Performance in High-Stakes Examinations: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Nigeria's Secondary School Leavers

Researcher - Ms. Jane Nebe, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK.

Please read the comments below and confirm that you are happy to participate in the research by indicating your name and signature afterwards.

I, …….. have read and understood the accompanying participant information sheet. Therefore:

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.
- I confirm that all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that all my personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that my name will not be used or identified in any report.
- I agree for audio recordings to be taken during the data collection sessions
- I understand that taking part is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
- I understand that data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely.
- I agree to the anonymous use of selected quotations from anything I say in written reports or other publicly available texts such as journal articles, books and conference presentations.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date** _ _/ _ _/ _ _ _ _

Researcher Name: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ **Date** _ _/ _ _/ _ _ _ _

Appendix 2: Life-Grid Chart

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this life-grid session. Please, fill in your information and respond to the life-grid below.

Name: ..... **Gender:** ..... **Date of Birth:** ..... **Year of Completing Secondary School:** ..... **Subject Discipline:** Science/ Arts/Commercial/ Technical

ACADEMIC LIFE-GRID

School Level	YEAR	School Type	LOCATION	Subject(s) with best performance and the grade	Subject(s) with worst performance and the grade	Most liked subject(s)	Most disliked subject(s)	Higher or further education aspiration	Dream Career / Job
SS 1									
SS2									
SS3									
WASSCE									
NECO									
GCE									
NABTEB									

Appendix 3: Guide for Life-Grid Follow-Up Interview

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this free-writing / semi-structured interview session. Please, fill in your information and respond to the task in writing or verbally.

Name: …… **Gender**: …….. **Date of Birth**: ……..
Year of Completing Secondary School: ……..
Subject Discipline: Science/ Arts/Commercial/ Technical
Type of Secondary school attended: Private/ Public/ both

FREE – WRITING TASK / SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. How did you prepare for the WAEC and/or NECO Examination(s)? Mention the people and activities that helped or frustrated your preparations.

2. Please, describe how you felt when you saw/received your WAEC and/or NECO examination results. Kindly express your deepest thoughts and emotions about this experience.

3. How did your WAEC and/or NECO examination results affect or change your initial educational plans?

4. Please, tell me about any incident that may have happened while you were preparing and/or writing the WAEC or NECO examinations, which you think may have affected your result/grades.

Be assured that anything you write/say will be kept confidential and used anonymously. You can also stop anytime you wish to discontinue.
Thank you.

Appendix 4: Research Participants' Information Sheet for the Quantitative Phase

HIGH-STAKES EXAMINATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE (HSEEAQ)

Research Participants' Information Sheet

Hello! My name is Jane Nebe and I am a PhD student at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK. I want to invite you to kindly complete this High-Stakes Examinations and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ) for my PhD research. To decide whether you would like to respond to the Questionnaire or not, please read the information below carefully.

1. What is the PhD research about?

The title of the PhD research is '***The consequences of poor academic performance in High-Stakes examinations: Exploring the lived experiences of Nigeria's secondary school leavers***. The research aims to explore how academic performance in High-stakes examinations like WASSCE [15] and NECO SSCE [16] affect secondary school leavers' aspirations for higher education.

2. **What do you benefit if you participate**?

This Questionnaire is an opportunity for you to tell us your experience of High-stakes examinations in Nigeria and contribute to knowledge that may help other young people.

3. **Do you have to participate?**

No. Participation is entirely voluntary. You decide whether to participate or not. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of this Research Participants' Information Sheet to keep. You are free to stop participating at any time without any penalty. If you however decide not to participate, you don't have to give any reason.

4. **How do you participate?**

You will be asked to respond honestly to the questions in the HSEEA Questionnaire. Completing it will last for about 20 minutes and there will be clear instructions to guide you at every step.

5. **What about your privacy and confidentiality?**

The data from the Questionnaires and all information related to you will be stored in a secured, password protected computer account in accordance with the University of Bristol's ethical requirements. Any real names mentioned will be changed to ensure that you cannot be identified from the data. The results of this research will be written up as a formal report, but any data that can identify you will be changed or removed in order to protect your identity.

6. **What is my role as researcher?**

I, the researcher will contact you, explain the information provided here and answer your questions. If you agree to participate, I will obtain your informed consent and administer the HSEEA Questionnaire to you. When you have completed the questionnaire, I will collect it and will only contact you further, if there are any questions regarding the information you have provided.

7. What do you do now?

Ask your questions, if you have any. Then, sign the attached consent form if you wish to participate in completing the High-Stakes Examinations and Educational Aspirations Questionnaire (HSEEAQ). If you need further information or clarification, please contact me through jn14126@bristol.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for considering taking part in the research.

Jane Nebe
PhD Researcher
Graduate School of Education
University of Bristol, UK.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS TO:
Professor Sally Thomas: s.thomas@bristol.ac.uk
Dr. Angeline Barrett: Angeline.Barrett@bristol.ac.uk

[15] WASSCE is the acronym for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination.

[16] NECO SSCE is the acronym for National Examinations Council Senior School Certificate Examination.

Appendix 5: HSEEAQ Vignette-based Questionnaire

HIGH-STAKES EXAMINATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE (HSEEAQ)

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

Before completing the HSEEAQ, please indicate that you give your consent to the researcher to use the data you choose to share as follows:

- ✓ I have read and understood the Research participants' information sheet.
- ✓ I confirm that all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- ✓ I give my consent to the researcher to use the responses.

Participant: **Yes / No** **Date:** **_____/ _____/ _____**

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU

1. ***What is your date of birth in this order dd/mm/year?*** _____ / _____ / _____
2. ***Please underline your gender.*** Female / Male
3. ***What year did you complete Senior Secondary School?*** _____
4. ***What occupies most of your time presently?***
   a. Preparing for an examination. **Please state the name of exam:** _____
   b. Working. **Please state when you started the job:** _____
   c. Acquiring a skill. **Please specify the skill:** _____
   d. Undergoing a training. **Please specify the kind of training**: _____
   e. Staying at home. **Please specify what you mostly do:** _____
   f. Other. **Please specify what the 'other' is**: _____
5. **In the table below, indicate the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations in which you obtained a D, E or F grade (if any); as well as the subject, year and the city it was obtained.** The secondary school exit Certificate Examinations include the NECO SSCE (National Examinations Council Senior School Certificate Examination) and the WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination).

GRADE	SUBJECT (S)	EXAM	YEAR	CITY
A1				
B2/B3				
D7				
E8				
F9				

SECTION 2: ABOUT YOUR EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

6. Which type of Tertiary institution appeals to you most?

a. University
b. Monotechnic / Polytechnic
c. College of Education
d. Other Degree-awarding institution. Please specify _____
e. None

7. What is the MAIN reason why you are not yet in a tertiary institution?

a. I don't want to go to a tertiary institution
b. I am not intelligent enough for a tertiary institution
c. Tertiary institutions don't offer my course of interest.
d. I did not attain the UTME and/or POST-UTME cut-off points for admission.
e. I did not obtain good grade(s) in NECO SSCE / WASSCE for the required subjects.
f. Finance
g. Marriage
h. Disability
i. Ill health / sickness
j. Work
k. I was expelled
l. Family challenges / commitment
m. Other. Please specify _____

8. What is the highest level of education you aspire to attain before you are 30 years old?

a. Postgraduate level – PhD
b. Postgraduate level - Masters
c. Postgraduate level - Diploma / Certificate
d. Bachelor degree (BSc) / Higher National Diploma (HND)
e. Ordinary National Diploma (OND) / National Certificate of Education (NCE)
f. Apprenticeship Certificate
g. Traineeship certificate
h. Senior Secondary School Certificate
i. Other. Please specify _____
j. I Don't know

9. What kind of career or job do you aspire to have when you are about 30 years old?

_____

10. What course do you need to study in a Tertiary Institution to have this type of career / Job?

_____

SECTION 3: ABOUT SECONDARY SCHOOL EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

Please use a tick (√) to indicate whether you 'Disagree', 'Agree' or 'Neither Agree nor Disagree' with the statements below, about secondary school exit **Certificate Examinations** like **NECO SSCE** and **WASSCE**.

S/N	STATEMENTS	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
11	Certificate Examinations does **not** accurately reflect what students were taught in secondary school.			
12	Certificate Examinations discourage some students from completing secondary school.			
13	Certificate Examinations does **not** pressure students to engage in examination malpractices.			
14	Certificate Examinations cause anxiety and stress for students.			
15	Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can change someone's educational plan.			
16	Poor performance in Certificate Examinations can affect students' successes in future careers.			
17	Poor performance in Certificate Examinations is a sign of a student's poor academic performance while in secondary school.			
18	Students' good grades in Certificate Examinations strongly show that a school has good, quality teachers.			
19	Getting good grades in Certificate Examinations is the **MAIN** reason why we attend secondary school.			
20	It is **easier** to get good grades in the NECO SSCE than it is in the WASSCE.			

SECTION 4: ABOUT EXAMINATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Please read the stories below and respond to the attached questions.

21. Effiong wants to be a Mechanical Engineer. Because of this, he did apprenticeship with a Mechanic for some weeks during a school holiday. Last year, Effiong sat for both the WASSCE and NECO SSCE. Sadly, his NECO SSCE result was seized and in his WASSCE, he had F9 in Physics, E8 in Chemistry and D7 in Mathematics. To study Mechanical Engineering in the University, Effiong needs a minimum of C6 grade in these three subjects. Just before the examinations, Effiong started to learn how to play the Piano. Now, he is developing serious interest in Music and is thinking about pursuing a career in Music. He needs to decide on what to do with his future education. **If you are Effiong, what would you decide about your future education and why?**

_____
_____
_____
_____

22. Bola plans to study Law in the University. She made all her subjects at both the WASSCE and NECO SSCE. Last year, she wrote the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Exam (UTME) and got 240, but was not given admission. Her friend who had 220 got admission because she had 6 'A' grades but Bola had only one 'A' grade. The University had used a Point-based system where students with better grades in the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations get higher points. Bola is about to fill the application for this year's UTME. She is wondering if she will be able to get admission this time if she puts Law as her first choice again, considering that she will be using the same result. **If you are Bola, what course would you fill in and why?**

_____
_____
_____
_____

23. Ada is Uju's friend. They both attend DEF school. Ada will stop attending DEF school by Friday, because she has registered for WASSCE and NECO SSCE at HIJ school. HIJ school would assist her get good grades through examination malpractices. Ada has advised Uju to also register at the HIJ school because she thinks "passing examinations is not about how intelligent you are". DEF school has good teachers and are working hard to prepare their students for the forthcoming examination. However, they will not take part in examination malpractices. Uju cannot re-sit the examination if she fails any subject because of finances. Now, Uju is wondering if she should listen to Ada and register at HIJ school. **If you are Uju, what would you do and why?**

_____
_____
_____
_____

24. Ovie lost his father when he was 7. It was tough for him growing up. His mother is just a petty trader. She insists that Ovie gets a University education, although she cannot afford the cost. When Ovie wrote the WASSCE, he did not obtain a Credit grade in English Language, which is required for University admission. Ovie decided to get a job, which he did. It's been 3 years now. Ovie is now ready to pursue a University education. He wrote the NECO SSCE and made a Credit grade in English Language. However, he needs to keep his job while schooling, as this is his only source of income. A part-time programme is not feasible because his course of interest –Medicine is not done through part-time programme. **If you are Ovie, what would you do and why?**

_____
_____
_____
_____

25. Aisha finished secondary school two years ago. She wants to study Accountancy at the university. Unfortunately, she didn't make Credit grades in Mathematics and Accounts at both the WASSCE and NECO SSCE. Last year, she rewrote both WASSCE and NECO SSCE. She obtained a Credit grade in Accounts in the NECO SSCE but her Mathematics was an E8 grade in both examinations. She was devastated. She decided to write the GCE instead. Result was just released. She got an F9 in Mathematics. **If you are Aisha, what would you do now and why?**

_____
_____
_____
_____

THE END.
Thank you for completing the HSEEAQ.

Appendix 6: Data Collection Schedule

JANE NEBE's DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE				
DATE	**PHASE**	**AIM**	**PROCEDURE**	**PRODUCT**
9 - 15 Jan 2017	**PILOT**	Obtain 2 secondary school leavers with poor academic performance in the CEs	* Scout for potential participants and arrange meeting sessions *Provide research information to them * Obtain informed consent to participate	Revised Life-grid and free-writing task
16 – 22 Jan 2017		Pilot the Life-Grid and free Writing task	* Administer the research instruments * Begin transcription of audio recording	
23 – 31st Jan 2017		Analyse the Pilot Data	*Conclude transcription of audio recordings * Analyse the data collected * Scout and initiate contact with gatekeepers for Qual phase	
1st – 12th Feb 2017	**QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION**	Obtain 10 participants for the QUAL Phase	* Access gatekeepers and their jurisdictions * Meet Potential Participants *Provide research information to them * Obtain informed consent to participate * Arrange schedule for data collection with participants	* signed informed consent forms * Appointments for data collection with each participant.
13th – 19th Feb 2017		Collect Data from Participants 1 and 2	* Administer life-grid sessions, free-writing task and unstructured interview in that order. * Debrief Participants	*Audio Recordings * completed life-grid charts * Completed free writing tasks
20th – 26th Feb 2017		Collect Data from Participants 3 and 4		
27th Feb – 5th Mar 2017		Collect Data from Participants 5 and 6		
6th – 12th Mar 2017		Collect Data from Participants 7 and 8		
13th - 19th Mar 2017		Collect Data from Participants 9 and 10		
20th – 31st Mar 2017		Transcribe all audio recordings		* Transcripts
1st – 23rd Apr 2017	**QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**	Conduct preliminary analysis of all transcripts, life-grid and free-writing products.	Use the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method	* Educational trajectory profiling of each participants * Anecdotes and themes for developing vignettes for questionnaire
24th – 30th April	**QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**	Develop a Questionnaire draft	Use responses from the Qual Phase and literature to develop questionnaire	* Filled Questionnaires from 150 respondents
1st – 7th May 2017		Pilot the Questionnaire draft with 5 respondents	* Scout for potential respondents * Try out the Questionnaire	
8th – 14th May 2017		Analyse and Revise the Questionnaire	* analyse the piloted questionnaires. * Use the analysis to revise the questionnaire to guide	
15th – 31st May 2017		Administer and obtain returns of the Questionnaires	* Administer questionnaires to 150 respondents	
5th – 16th June 2017	**Exit the Field**	Conclude data collection activities	Appreciate Participants in Qual phase with a motivational book and diary	End of Data collection

Appendix 7: Signed GSOE Research Ethics Form

GSoE RESEARCH ETHICS FORM

Name(s): Jane NEBE
Proposed research project: The Consequences of Poor Performance in High-Stakes Examinations: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Nigeria's Secondary School Leavers
Proposed funder(s): Commonwealth Scholarships Commission in the UK (CSCUK)
Discussants for ethics meeting:
i)Abi'odun Oyewole: I had a prior discussion with her about the ethical issues to put into consideration for a fieldwork in the Nigerian context. This is because of her familiarity with the context, having successfully navigated the same context for her research.
ii) Marcia Sarah Shah: I had the main discussion with her on ethical issues surrounding methods and fieldwork.
Name of supervisors: Prof. Sally Thomas; Dr. Talia Isaacs
Has your supervisor seen this submitted draft of your ethics application? Yes

Please include an outline of the project or append a short (1 page) summary:
My doctoral research aims to understand how the experience of failing to obtain success benchmarks in High-stakes examinations affect secondary school leavers' educational trajectories. This will be done by exploring students' lived experiences of poor performance in Nigeria's secondary school exit Certificate Examinations and the potential/actual consequences that the experience mediates. Data collection instruments include a Life-Grid, Free writing task, Interviews and a Questionnaire. The research findings are expected to extend the existing literature on the consequences of high stakes testing, by illuminating consequences through the prism of lived experiences of failure in a different context. Furthermore, the similarities and differences between evidence from the international literature and research findings will provide a broader conceptualisation of consequences in high stakes testing. Most importantly, the research findings will provide informed guidance for Nigeria's policy and practice, on how to effectively engage and assist secondary school leavers who experience failure in their High-stakes examinations. Finally, the Thesis will be an important contribution to the Nigerian literature on High-stakes testing, a currently under-researched topic in that context.

Ethical issues discussed and decisions taken are as follows:
PS: The ethical issues below mainly address the phase of collecting qualitative data using the Life-Grid, Free writing task and interviews. Since the questionnaire will be responded to anonymously; there is a distanced and detached relationship between the researcher and respondents. Nonetheless, ethical issues that concern the administration of questionnaires will be briefly addressed.

1. **Researcher access/ exit**
Qualitative data will be collected from 10 purposefully selected secondary school leavers who attend examination preparatory centres and are aged 18 and above. Previous contacts and gatekeepers will be relied on to access potential participants at two of these centres. At the first centre, which is owned by a mutual acquaintance, access to address potential participants will be negotiated verbally and in writing through him (i.e. the proprietor). At the second centre, access to address potential participants will also be negotiated verbally and in writing through the administrator of the centre. After addressing the potential participants and explaining the research to them, their willingness to participate will be sought. This will be done by asking willing participants to contact me afterwards in person or using a dedicated phone number that is solely for the field work. There will be no physical/material incentive for participation. Rather, participants will be encouraged to see their participation as (i) a cathartic experience as they reflect on a part of their lives (ii) a platform for telling their stories (iii) a means to make their voices heard and (iv) a contribution to knowledge that could benefit other

young people with similar stories. Furthermore, it will be stressed to potential participants that their participation is entirely voluntary, and they are not obligated to participate because of their gatekeepers. To exit the field, participants will be notified of the impending conclusion of the project prior to the last data collection activity. After the last data collection activity, there will be a debriefing session to review the data collection experience and to allow them ask any questions regarding the research. Finally, they will be thanked in writing and given an appreciation token of a motivational book and a diary. The dedicated phone number will be kept available for three months; after which it will be demobilised. For the administration of the questionnaire, access will also be through personal contacts and gatekeepers.

2. Information given to participants

Three categories of information will be given to participants verbally and in writing. The first category is a summary of the research aim. The second category of information would be about the expectations from the participants in terms of resources e.g. time; content e.g. examination experience; permissions e.g. to audio record; and attitude e.g. openness and sincerity. The third category of information will be what participants can expect from the researcher in terms of anonymity/confidentiality, the way their data will be used and stored and for how long, rights to withdraw without explanations, as well as the researcher's sensitivity to their schedule, preferences, health status, and their emotional well-being during the research process. With the aid of an information sheet, each point will be read and explained together to the participants. After which, they append their name and date in their own handwriting to affirm that they understood the explanations. For the questionnaire, information will be limited to only the first category.

3. Participants right of withdrawal

It will be emphasised to willing participants before and during the data collection activities that they have the right to withdraw their participation in the research at any time, without giving explanations. If they decide at any point to withdraw, there will be a debriefing session with the individual to address the concerns they may have and ensure that they are not leaving the research with grievances or resentments. Most importantly, I would confirm that it is okay to use any data they have provided prior to that point. If the debriefing session does not sufficiently allay their concerns, they will be advised to channel their complaints to the appropriate contacts that had been provided. I would however immediately notify my Supervisors informing them of the development, so that they can advise me appropriately.

4. Informed consent

After providing the previously highlighted information to likely participants and they have expressed willingness to participate, their consent will be sought in writing and verbally. The likely participants for this research are provisionally seen as adults because, secondary school is completed averagely at the age of 18, the official adult age in the Nigerian context. Consequently, only their consent will suffice for participation. After providing the relevant information to the participants and they have agreed to participate, they will be given the informed consent form that we would go through together to append their name, signature and date. They will be encouraged to query or raise concerns about any part of the consent form as we go through it together. In the questionnaire, there will also be a part where respondents are asked to give their informed consent after all the appropriate information had been given.

5. Complaints procedure

On the information sheet, the email address of my supervisor will be provided should in case they have any complaints about the research activities. The issues that border on 'complaints' will be explained to them but they will be encouraged to kindly give me the chance to resolve the matter amicably first. If they are unhappy with my intervention, they can then proceed to make complaints.

6. Safety and well-being of participants/ researchers
With the safety of my participants in mind, all research activities will be conducted within the premises of the examination coaching centres. But it would be in a secluded but visible part where no one can eavesdrop on our conversation or barge into our activity. Thus, I will seek assistance from the gatekeeper to ensure this. Furthermore, all research activity will be concluded on any day before it gets dark (dusk usually sets in around 6.30pm).

7. Anonymity/ confidentiality
The issue of anonymity/confidentiality during data collection, analysis and reporting is very important. Assurances will be provided to participants about the confidentiality of everything they tell me and the anonymization of their data when used. They will also be advised not to disclose anything they do not feel comfortable talking about. Data collected will be stored in password-encrypted devices. There will be no pictures taken or video recording of participants. In the Thesis report, pseudonyms will be used to identify participants and information that will make them easily identifiable will be withheld.

8. Data collection and Analysis
Before every data collection activity, I will ensure that the participants reassert their willingness to participate and affirm that they give permission to be audio-recorded. If a participant is unwilling to be recorded, data collection will still proceed with me taking notes as much as I can during the process and trying to recall as much as possible immediately after the encounter. This raises another ethical issue of accuracy of recall. I will ensure that I only write what I can clearly recall. Furthermore, during the interactions, I will take jottings using a lot of Mnemonics and key words/phrase to aid my recall. Another potential ethical issue is how I can affect the way the participant respond during the research process and how the participant can affect the way I handle the research process (Oliver, 2010). Therefore, I will be respectful to participants in the way I treat them and talk to them. Furthermore, I will be very sensitive to immediately change any approach that is impacting on the research process in an undesirable way. After transcribing relevant data, member checking will be employed to enhance the accuracy of the transcribed data. Peer debriefing will then be employed to enhance the reliability of the analysis and the interpretations therefrom.

9. Data storage and Protection
The data will be stored on my laptop which is always password protected and then backed up on the University of Bristol's encrypted data storage system. In the information sheet given to participants, I will outline the potential ways that the data will be used and ensure that I abide by only the agreed purposes. All the data stored on my laptop and in paper form will be retained till a year after the successful completion of the viva process before it is disposed permanently by deleting the softcopy and burning the hardcopy. The data stored on the University database will have been anonymised, so they can stay secured and accessible only for legitimate reasons and through due process.

10. Feedback and Reporting of research results
I do not intend to give participants the analysis report of their data because there will be no time for that on the field. However, if they are interested in how their data will be used, I will send an electronic copy of the Thesis report to them, on request. This is because as Oliver (2010) rightly points out, interim research results may differ significantly from the final research result. Nonetheless, accurate reporting of participants' utterances and output will be ensured while caution will be exercised in the interpretations that must emerge from the data.

11. Responsibilities to the disciplinary community of practice and the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission (CSC)
My first responsibility to the academic community of practice is to ensure that I abide by the codes of ethical practice of the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol and the British

Education Research Association (BERA). This has informed the ethical issues that have been discussed so far. Methodological rigour will be exhibited at every level of the research under the guidance of my supervisors. My second responsibility to the academic community of practice is to report findings truthfully and accurately. My third responsibility is to not plagiarise. Finally, it is my responsibility to behave with respect and treat all that I encounter with respect. This is because I am an ambassador of the University within the context where data is collected. Therefore, a high level of integrity would be displayed in all the dealings with people generally and the participants particularly. Finally, as a recipient of the Commonwealth scholarship, I cannot significantly deviate from the research problem that the research is intended to tackle and for which funding was received. Therefore, I will ensure that I do not lost sight of the research objectives. Most importantly, the data that is collected must be valid, relevant and sufficient for answering the research questions.

Signed: (Jane Nebe)
Signed: (Marcia Sarah Shah) 
Date: 3rd October 2016

REFERENCES

Oliver, P. (2010). *The student's guide to research ethics*. Open University Press.

Appendix 8: Themes from the NVivo Analysis of the HSEEAQ Vignette Items

ITEM 21: EFFIONG'S VIGNETTE

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggre
Nodes\\EFFIONG	268	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Change Course	1	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Pursue both music and Mechanical engineering	31	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Pursue Mechanical engineering	23	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Pursue Mechanical engineering\Rewrite the CE	59	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Pursue Music as a Career	102	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Pursue Music as a Career\...But rewrite the CE first	12	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Self-evaluation	29	
Nodes\\EFFIONG\Vague_ambiguous responses	10	

ITEM 22: BOLA'S VIGNETTE

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate num
Nodes\\BOLA	268	
Nodes\\BOLA\Change educational choice\Change Course permanently	106	
Nodes\\BOLA\Repeat Law	93	
Nodes\\BOLA\Change educational choice\Change Course temporarily	31	
Nodes\\BOLA\Repeat Law\Repeat Law - Rewrite SSCE	14	
Nodes\\BOLA\Repeat Law\Repeat Law_Change later if...	11	
Nodes\\BOLA\Repeat Law\Repeat Law_change institution	5	
Nodes\\BOLA\Change educational choice\Change Institution	4	
Nodes\\BOLA\Don't know _ Vague _ ambiguous response	3	
Nodes\\BOLA\Self Evaluation	3	
Nodes\\BOLA\Change educational choice	0	

ITEM 23: UJU'S VIGNETTE

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggreg
Nodes\\UJU	268	
Nodes\\UJU\Depends on...	17	
Nodes\\UJU\No to EXAM MALPractices	167	
Nodes\\UJU\Vague_Ambiguous_dont know	14	
Nodes\\UJU\YES to Exam Malpractices	71	

ITEM 24: OVIE'S VIGNETTE

Nodes	Number of coding references
Nodes\\OVIE	268
Nodes\\OVIE\NO Higher Education	3
Nodes\\OVIE\NO Higher Education\Acquire a Skill	3
Nodes\\OVIE\NO Higher Education\Stay working	8
Nodes\\OVIE\POSTPONE Higher Education	40
Nodes\\OVIE\PROCEED for Higher Education	28
Nodes\\OVIE\PROCEED for Higher Education\KEEP Working	18
Nodes\\OVIE\PROCEED for Higher Education\KEEP Working\Change Course	71
Nodes\\OVIE\PROCEED for Higher Education\KEEP Working\Change job _ open business	18
Nodes\\OVIE\PROCEED for Higher Education\KEEP Working\Go for Medicine	12
Nodes\\OVIE\PROCEED for Higher Education\STOP Working	40
Nodes\\OVIE\Self-Evaluation	9
Nodes\\OVIE\VaGue_ambiguous_dont know	17

ITEM 25: AISHA'S VIGNETTE

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggreg
Nodes\\AISHA	268	
Nodes\\AISHA\Change educational aspiration	71	
Nodes\\AISHA\Leave Education	5	
Nodes\\AISHA\Leave Education\Leave Education_Change direction	8	
Nodes\\AISHA\Leave Education\Leave Education_Go for a Job_Biz	12	
Nodes\\AISHA\Leave Education\Leave Education_Learn a Trade	22	
Nodes\\AISHA\Rewrite the Certificate Examination	75	
Nodes\\AISHA\Rewrite the Certificate Examination\Rewrite the CE_Engage in Malpractice	6	
Nodes\\AISHA\Rewrite the Certificate Examination\Rewrite the CE_Obtain positive help	16	
Nodes\\AISHA\Rewrite the Certificate Examination\Rewrite the CE_Pray_Trust God	18	
Nodes\\AISHA\Rewrite the Certificate Examination\Rewrite the CE_Read _work hard	45	
Nodes\\AISHA\Seek Direction	1	
Nodes\\AISHA\Seek Direction\Seek Direction_From God	5	
Nodes\\AISHA\Seek Direction\Seek direction_From Self evaluation	9	
Nodes\\AISHA\Uncertain_Don't know what to do	8	

Appendix 9: Themes from the NVivo Analysis of FOUR Interview Transcripts

A) **THEMES from ISA's interview transcripts**

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of codi
Nodes\\A belief in God	1	
Nodes\\Anxious before NECO SSCE Result	1	
Nodes\\Applied for the NDA	7	
Nodes\\Armed Forces Liking influenced by Family	1	
Nodes\\Aspiring to be in GOVERNMENT	1	
Nodes\\Attended Extramural Lessons for Exam Preparation	2	
Nodes\\Attended Govt School	5	
Nodes\\Blame Maths Teachers for students' issues	2	
Nodes\\Confidence before Exit CEs	1	
Nodes\\Corruption in Nigeria's marking system	1	
Nodes\\Deceased Father	1	
Nodes\\Desire to learn Computer use	2	
Nodes\\Economics Love_hate relationship	1	
Nodes\\Empathy for the discrimination of Females	5	
Nodes\\Excited about WASSCE result	2	
Nodes\\Existing Exam Malpractices effort	1	
Nodes\\EXIT CE at a Government school	2	
Nodes\\Family's Armed Forces Members	2	
Nodes\\Foreseen challenges in the Future	1	
Nodes\\Friends who failed COZ of Exam Malpractices	1	
Nodes\\Hall NOT conducive for Exam Malpractices	1	
Nodes\\High Esteem for WAEC_WASSCE	6	
Nodes\\I dislike Maths	1	
Nodes\\I was good at Maths	1	
Nodes\\International Relations as Course Alternative	2	
Nodes\\Lit_English deficiency and Dream Course	2	
Nodes\\Living and Working for Sister	2	

Nodes\\Maths Extramural lesson could have helped	1
Nodes\\Maths is too difficult for me	2
Nodes\\Military ASPIRATION	9
Nodes\\Military ASPIRATION\Military through the NDA route	2
Nodes\\Military ASPIRATION\Military through the University route	2
Nodes\\Motivation to be a Politician	4
Nodes\\Mum's influence on Military Aspiration	2
Nodes\\NECO SSCE result	3
Nodes\\No involvement in Special Centre Arrangement	2
Nodes\\Peer Group Study	3
Nodes\\Perception of Self	1
Nodes\\Political Science as Dream Course	4
Nodes\\preparing for JAMB	2
Nodes\\Private Schools better than Govt Schools	2
Nodes\\Reading for the Exit CEs	1
Nodes\\School's NON-INVOLVEMENT in Special Centre Arrangement	1
Nodes\\Skeptism about easy NDA admission	1
Nodes\\Surprised by exit CE result	3
Nodes\\The Military or Nothing Else	5
Nodes\\Unpleasant secondary school incident	1
Nodes\\Use of Past Questions for Exam Preparation	1
Nodes\\WASSCE Result	6

B) THEMES from ABI's interview transcripts

Nodes
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences
Nodes\\Constrained Choices
Nodes\\Disabled Agency
Nodes\\Distressing Dislocations
Nodes\\Limiting Circumstances
Nodes\\Lived Experience of WASSCE
Nodes\\Persistence and Consistency
Nodes\\Support Structures
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Exam Malpractices
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Teaching to the test
Nodes\\Disabled Agency\Change of Guardians
Nodes\\Disabled Agency\Doing NECO instead of WAEC
Nodes\\Disabled Agency\Getting extra academic help
Nodes\\Distressing Dislocations\Distress in the Society
Nodes\\Limiting Circumstances\Money
Nodes\\Persistence and Consistency\Rewriting the exit CE
Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships
Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships\A Religious disconnect
Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships\No more Friends
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Positive consequences
Nodes\\Disabled Agency\Changing school
Nodes\\Distressing Dislocations\Dislocation from Family
Nodes\\Lived Experience of WASSCE\Confused by WASSCE Result
Nodes\\Lived Experience of WASSCE\Family blamed me
Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships\A dead Mother
Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships\A StepMother who didn't want her
Nodes\\Support Structures\People
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Delay to higher education pursuits
Nodes\\Constrained Choices\Academic choices
Nodes\\DIssapointments
Nodes\\Distressing Dislocations\Distress in Personal life
Nodes\\Limiting Circumstances\Resources
Nodes\\Limiting Circumstances\Self
Nodes\\Limiting Circumstances\Time
Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships\An unkind Guardian
Nodes\\Support Structures\Faith in God
Nodes\\Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Extra Tutorial Lessons
Nodes\\Lived Experience of WASSCE\Difficult SS Schooling Experience
Nodes\\Persistence and Consistency\Aspirations
Nodes\\Constrained Choices\A Dad in control
Nodes\\Lived Experience of WASSCE\Scored Mathematics F
Nodes\\Support Structures\Academic Support
Nodes\\Constrained Choices\A Guardian in charge
Nodes\\Limiting Circumstances\People

C) THEMES from CHI's interview Transcripts

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggr
Nodes\\AGENCY	2	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS	0	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS\Career Aspirations	2	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS\Educational Aspirations	2	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE	0	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences	0	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Boost Confidence	2	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Changing Plan	1	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Delay	2	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Exam Malpractices	4	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Preparation	4	
Nodes\\EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Result	3	
Nodes\\HUMAN CAPITAL	1	
Nodes\\HUMAN CAPITAL\ELDER BROTHER	2	
Nodes\\HUMAN CAPITAL\FATHER	2	
Nodes\\HUMAN CAPITAL\PEERS (Reading group)	1	
Nodes\\HUMAN CAPITAL\SELF	1	
Nodes\\HUMAN CAPITAL\TEACHER	0	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS	0	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\External Family_Society	2	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\Father	13	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\Peers	2	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\School	2	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\Self	3	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\Siblings	3	
Nodes\\INFLUENCERS\Teacher _ Teaching	4	
Nodes\\SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE	0	
Nodes\\SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE\Data Processing		1
Nodes\\SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE\French		1
Nodes\\SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE\Mathematics		5

D) THEMES from CYN's interview Transcripts

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number c
Nodes\\ADVANTAGES	0	
Nodes\\ADVANTAGES\During exit CE	1	
Nodes\\AGENCY	1	
Nodes\\AGENCY\Aspiration Choice	3	
Nodes\\AGENCY\Exam Preparations	2	
Nodes\\AGENCY\Mathematics	1	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS	0	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS\Career Aspirations	2	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS\EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION	4	
Nodes\\ASPIRATIONS\Influence on Aspiration	3	
Nodes\\BELIEFS_MORAL COMPASS	2	
Nodes\\DISADVANTAGES	0	
Nodes\\DISADVANTAGES\No Maths Teacher in SSS	1	
Nodes\\DISADVANTAGES\School	2	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE	0	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Consequences	5	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Exam Conduct	5	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Exam Malpractice	3	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Preparation	1	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Results	6	
Nodes\\EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\WASSCE vs NECO SSCE	1	
Nodes\\GETTING HEI ADMISSION	3	
Nodes\\IDENTITY_SELF PERCEPTION	3	
Nodes\\LIFE AFTER SEC SCHOOL	1	
Nodes\\RELATIONSHIPS	0	
Nodes\\RELATIONSHIPS\Dad	4	
Nodes\\RELATIONSHIPS\Mum	5	
Nodes\\RELATIONSHIPS\Other Family Members	4	
Nodes\\SUBJECT EXPERIENCE	0	
Nodes\\SUBJECT EXPERIENCE\Accounts	2	
Nodes\\SUBJECT EXPERIENCE\Economics	2	
Nodes\\SUBJECT EXPERIENCE\Mathematics	2	
Nodes\\TEACHERS AS VALUABLE	1	

Appendix 10: Ude's Lived Experience Description

GENDER:	**MALE**
DATE OF BIRTH:	**19/06/1996**
YEAR OF COMPLETING SEC SCHOOL:	**2014**
SUBJECT DISCIPLINE:	**ARTS/SOCIAL SCIENCE**

1.0 QUESTIONS FOR THIS ANALYSIS

1. How does Ude make sense of his academic achievement in the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations (CEs)?
2. What consequences does experiencing the CEs engender for Ude, especially in relation to his educational aspirations?

2.0 PROFILE

Ude, a male, was born on 19th June, 1996. He completed secondary school and wrote both the WASSCE and the NECO SSCE in 2014 at the age of 18. His subject combinations in the exams were in the Arts/social sciences. After secondary school, he went for apprenticeship in his brother's clothing business for two years and some months in another city. He returned to the city where we met about two months earlier, to focus on obtaining admission into higher education. At the time of the data collection (14/02/2017 for the Life-Grid session and 24/02/2017 for the Interview session), Ude was 21 years old and preparing for the university entrance examination. He has a mild form of stuttering that he controls effectively as I didn't have any problem with his response during the interviews.

3.0 SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Ude attended a private secondary school that is owned by the Catholic church. In SS1, they were expected to do subjects across the different disciplines and then make a choice for a

disciplinary path in SS2. This exposure to several subjects was designed to help students begin to think around the discipline to pursue and make informed decisions. The pure Sciences was his first choice for SS2 because he aspired to be a Pharmacist. However, he recalls that Physics, a core subject for the sciences was one of the three subjects that gave him *'tough tim*e' in SS1. Geography and Literature-in-English were the other subjects. Going through the Physics contents, which required familiarity with formulas and doing calculations, he noted that at the time he wasn't sure it was something he was going to be able to do in the future.

Despite the tough time he was having with Physics, Ude recalls that he liked Chemistry as he understood and liked the subject. He describes it thus:

> *when I was in SS1...I understand everything in chemistry. I like chemistry. I have the textbook. I study everything. Even the gas law, general gas law, everything. I understand Chemistry well.*

Reflecting on his experience of Chemistry, in relation to his experience in Physics, he thinks that it might have been because of the teacher who taught him chemistry in SS1. According to him:

> *when I was in SS1, the chemistry teacher then, he is a man. He made sure that you understand everything....he will explain everything even the formula. He will explain everything to the end that you will understand if you have question.*

Being his first encounter with the subject, this may probably be the case because he later narrates his unpleasant experience of Chemistry under a new female teacher in SS2 as follows:

> *when I was in SS2. They changed the teacher and bring (sic) another woman. The woman was taking us in chemistry and Biology. I don't really understand her very well.... she will just tell you to go and read something like this. If you come in the class, it will be more of discussion. You will come and explain. And you know when you are in secondary school, a teacher need to at least give you guidelines. But as of that woman, she don't use to...if you ask question, She will ask you to ask from your neighbour students.*

There was only one other male in the Science class that he was, since the rest were girls. Ude recalled that asking the girls questions, as expected in the Chemistry class was a futile exercise for him because "*they will just fail their words...you know girls [and] their character, they will*

not give you what you want". Having started Chemistry with keen interest and enthusiasm, Ude became increasingly disillusioned with Chemistry particularly, and the science class in general. The second reason why Ude became increasingly disillusioned with the science class arose from how most of his close friends joined the Arts/social science class when he got to SS2, and he was unable to blend in with the new crowd in the Science class. This eventually contributed to his dropping out of the Science class to join the Arts/Social Science class later in SS2. This is how he puts it:

> *Some of my friends...in school...majority of them joined Art class and those ones that I'm with in Science class are not the ones that I used to cooperate well with and... most of them are girls. It's only one boy. So, I checked it. I don't know whether I can continue. So, I just dropped everything about Science when I was in SS2.*

He moved to the Arts/Social Science and was there till he completed secondary school and sat for the exit Certificate examinations.

4.0 EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION EXPERIENCE

Ude registered for both the WASSCE and the NECO SSCE in the same year (2014). NECO SSCE was a contingency plan, that is, a backup plan in the eventuality that his grades at the WASSCE did not meet his expectation. This decision would eventually pay off for Ude because he didn't make the minimum benchmark of Credit grades in Economics and Commerce at the WASSCE (the first exam he wrote) but obtained Credit grades and above in all the subjects he did at the NECO SSCE. Ude however feels that he prepared harder for WASSCE than the NECO SSCE, although his results in the NECO SSCE was better.

> *I prepared harder for WAEC but we are told to write NECO. So, I registered for NECO…. I didn't prepare much just like as I prepared for WAEC… I prepare harder for WAEC than NECO.*

While preparing for both exams, Ude recalled that his brother ensured that he had everything he needed. Against the background of teachers who persistently advised them to read hard, he put in lots of effort in preparing for the exams: "*Three months before the exam, our teachers are advising us to read hard...I had to try my best"*. Some of the things he did included

planning his reading, committed class attendance, group discussions, note-taking, attempting past exam questions and engaging in personal study after school hours.

> *I prepare timetable, read…we attend class… during our free period, me and my friends we go to the school library and discuss a lot of things there. If I went back home, after my home duties, I read before I sleep. Then I wake up in midnight to read more to prepare…..I used to read page by page. I started from our SS1 to read but I used to jot. Sometimes I will only go through my jotters and sometimes I will go through the notes. Sometimes I will bring the textbook and answer some summary questions there. So that's how I prepared.*

Here we see a strong agency on Ude's part in how he prepared for the exams. He also mentioned that teachers assisted them with preparations by bringing past questions of the CEs for solutions to be worked out together.

> *In the morning, [when] I came to school, we attend class and then some teachers will come with the past questions. The previous questions of WAEC. So, we used to ask questions then and answer some.*

At the school level, they were exempted from participating in the school chores such as general cleaning, which used to be shared amongst all the classes in the school. Provision was also made for them to have free periods in the class timetable.

> *They gave us free period to study on our own and ask questions. At a time, they stopped us from manual labours in the school. So we don't used to engage ourselves in the school manual labour.*

Despite the amount of freedom that they were given during the period they were preparing for the exams, they were still subject to authority. Ude recalls an incident where he tried to extend the boundary of the freedom that they were given. He was penalised for it and made a conscious decision to halt further testing of his boundaries so as to prevent penalties that could jeopardise his writing the exams. He describes the incident thus:

> *when the school were writing their second term exam, we are preparing for our WAEC. In an exam hall, the students were writing their exam. I just passed through the hall. One teacher called me back. So I came. She started flogging me. So I asked her [why. The teacher said,] 'I shouldn't go through this way'. I said,*

why? [The teacher said] 'they are writing exam'. I told the teacher I did not disturb them. Because the teacher was average (I'm taller than the teacher). I feel like to beat the teacher there. But I just left. I said I'm trying to write my exam. It will affect me if I did it. So I left the teacher. I go to the principal and report to the principal. I didn't do anything to the teacher. Even the students there in the hall. I did not talk. I just passed through there. That would have affect my result if I reacted to the teacher but I just forget about everything.

When the examinations commenced, Ude was taken aback by how it seemed that his experience of the exam questions contradicted with what his teachers had conditioned him to expect. According to him, the WASSCE questions were easy compared to how his teachers had conditioned him to believe that they were going to be hard. In his words:

When our teachers were telling us that WAEC is too hard, we should prepare harder. I'm thinking that the question I will see there, that I've not been seeing it before. But when we got there, everything was easy. It's only this Economics and Commerce, I don't know what really happened because other subjects were okay.

He probably found the exam questions easy because he prepared well. Unfortunately, his low grades in Economics and Commerce seem to have made a mockery of his impression about the exam. He also asserts that he found the NECO SSCE easy. According to him:

That NECO exam, it was easy. It wasn't that hard because some questions there is what we did in our annual exam (It's the Diocese that used to set the annual exam. it's not school…) Maybe some questions are from that NECO. I practiced all our past questions, both Annual and that NECO.

Here we see that although Ude says he didn't prepare so much for the NECO SSCE when compared to his preparation for the WASSCE, it actually seems that he prepared well enough considering his affirming that he practiced all the past questions of both the annual exam and the NECO SSCE.

Ude saw his NECO SSCE result before the WASSCE result. This is uncommon because WASSCE results are always released before the NECO SSCE, probably because the WASSCE is concluded

before the NECO SSCE begins. Ude reports that their WASSCE result was withheld for a while, during which the NECO SSCE results were released. Later, the WASSCE result was released. He said that their 'Dean of Studies' at the time told him that the WASSCE result for his school was withheld because the school did not register the minimum number of candidates that was required. Ude suspects that the school paid some monetary fines for the results to be released although it seemed that the result of one of the science subjects was cancelled entirely but he couldn't recall the details. He however suggests that the cancellation of the results of a subject may have had something to do with examination malpractices (most likely at the individual level), since he insists that there was no examination malpractices at the school level. He cites the school's status as a missionary school and its location in a church as factors that ensured the unlikelihood of exam malpractices at a school-wide level.

Having made good results in the NECO SSCE, Ude was very pleased but surprised considering that he felt he didn't prepare much for it. As a result, he had higher expectations about the WASSCE result before he saw it.

> *When I saw my NECO result, hmm I feel like well this NECO, I didn't prepare much for it, how come it's like this? So I said okay. Maybe WAEC will be more finer than the NECO.*

However, when he saw the WASSCE result with Credit grade deficiencies in Economics and Commerce, he was disappointed. He settled on the thought that it was perhaps the fate that God had designed for him: "*when I saw the WAEC, I just shook my head and said maybe it's how God wants it*". He contemplated rewriting another exit CE but considering that his NECO SSCE result was okay, he ditched the idea to do so. According to him:

> *When I looked at the WAEC result…my Economics D7, I did Commerce F9, and I want to write Economics in the course I want to do in the university, I feel like 'is this thing real?' As in, 'is this my result or what?'' Is this an obstacle that I will re-sit for WAEC'…. But I remember that I wrote NECO. I'm happy because the NECO is okay.*

Nonetheless, there is this nagging possibility of rewriting the CE, in his mind. This is connected first to his uncertainty about the acceptance of the NECO SSCE by the universities and the

desire to still pursue Pharmacy: "*During our post-UME*[17]*, if anything happens, then I will check whether I will re-sit for WAEC….. I think they said it's WAEC they use in UME. I don't know if they accept NECO".* Despite these, he was still going ahead with his plan to register for 'Economics and Management' whenever registration for the university matriculation exam commenced, based on the NECO SSCE results which qualified him to do so.

5.0 EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

When Ude moved to the Arts/Social Science Class in SS2, he wasn't happy at first with the decision he made to change classes, which by implication altered his educational aspiration to study Pharmacy. With time however, he discovered subjects within the social sciences that he really liked: Commerce, Economics, Government and Agricultural Science. He describes it thus:

> *When I joined Social Sciences class, I was not happy when I joined them because it affected my dream career but....I found Commerce, Economics and Government as the subjects that I really like and Agricultural Science.*

Consequently, he changed his initial aspiration of studying 'Pharmacy' in the higher institution to 'Business Administration'. To make this decision, he neither consulted a Teacher/Counsellor nor did he do personal research about the course 'Business Administration'. Rather, he asked some of his friends for recommendations on the courses that aligned with his subject combinations and they suggested Business Administration. So, he adopted Business Administration as the Course he would study at the higher education level. However, he mentioned that at the time, he wasn't comfortable with his choice of Business Administration because he felt that the Course wasn't a serious one in terms of its prospects and status. In SS3, he began to seriously contemplate his educational aspiration and his life prospects. This led him to investigate other available courses and eventually settled on Economics and Management because he never really liked Business Administration. In his words:

> *It was when I was in SS3, that I researched and found out that Economics can give you a lot of things in life.... So, I decide to go for Economics and Management*

[17] Post-UME used to be the name of the Universities' own matriculation examination for selecting students.

because that Business Administration, I don't really like it when I come to SS3. So I decided to choose Economics.

Thus, by the time he was writing the exit Certificate Examinations, his aspiration was to study Economics and Management in higher education.

One striking characteristics of Ude that comes through in his narrative is the influential role of the 'other' in the decisions he makes, whether the 'other' was a role model, peer, teacher or family member. He actually admits that having someone to motivate him was important to him. According to him:

you know in life what you need to succeed is more of motivation, somebody that can motivate you, tell you to keep on, try hard - That's what we need in life.

Both times that he had been solely responsible for choosing what to aspire educationally for, he had been influenced by visible role models in the Nigerian context. For instance, when he first aspired to study Pharmacy for a career as a Pharmacist, he looked up to a Pharmacist who had made huge impact in Nigeria's war against fake drugs:

When I was young, I looked up to Dora Akunyili. She was a great woman.... I looked at the background how she started, and she is a pharmacist. ... Pharmacy is a career that have a lot of things to do in life, helping in saving human lives...I like to help in life. So, I see Pharmacy as a dream career that I want to be but unfortunately as I was going on it all fade away.

In SS2, he changed class from the Sciences to the Arts/Social Sciences, which pre-empted him to change his educational aspirations from pharmacy to business administration. For the aspiration to do Business Administration, which was influenced by his friends, he made no mention of any role model. But by the time, he chose to go for Economics and Management, based on his own investigations, he mentioned influential role models within the Nigerian context: *"I looked up to Charles Soludo, the former CBN*[18] *governor. He is an economist. I [also] looked up to this former Minister..."* So, we see how role models provide positive images of how he would like to see himself in the nearest future.

6.0 ANALYSIS

When I looked at the WAEC result… - my Economics D7, I did commerce F9, and I want to write Economics in the course I want to do in the university, I feel like 'is this thing real?' As in, 'is this my result or what?'' Is this an obstacle that I will re-

[18] CBN is the acronym for Central Bank of Nigeria.

sit for WAEC'…? But I remember that I wrote NECO. I'm happy because the NECO is okay.

A. "If I'm to re-sit"

The results of the exit Certificate examinations initiated a conflict in Ude's educational aspirations. Ude saw the results of his NECO SSCE first. In it, he got good grades in all the subjects he sat for. So, his educational aspiration to study Economics and Management at the higher institution stayed possible. However, when the results of the WASSCE was released, he obtained below Credit grades in both Economics and Commerce. With this result alone, his aspiration to study Economics and Management was jeopardised because a minimum of Credit grade in Economics is a pre-requisite for his course of interest. As a result, he changed his plan by deciding that he would go for 'Business Administration' if his NECO SSCE result was not accepted. There is this misconception by some young people that some Universities STILL do not accept the NECO SSCE result because this used to be the case years ago. This is why Ude held the notion that it was possible for his NECO SSCE result not to be accepted. In that case, he would resort to his previous aspiration which he didn't really like, and which was recommended to him by friends because he states categorically that he does not want to re-sit the exam.

Again, at different points in his narrative, Ude declared repeatedly that if he ever attempts to re-sit the secondary school exit certificate exam, he will go for Science subject combinations. This is how he puts it:

I don't want to re-sit for the exam. But if I'm going to re-sit for the exam, I will go for Science subjects. I will not go for social science again.

On reflection, Ude expressed a strong regret for not sticking to his initial educational aspiration to do Pharmacy and confessed that he wasn't even happy about his decision to do Economics and Management: "*even this Economics and Management [course], I am not happy about it*". He maintains that his dream job is to be a Pharmacist which was unfortunately side-tracked by his experiences in SS2, as explained earlier:

Actually, I want to be a Pharmacist. That's my dream job but because of the change in teacher then and some of my classmates when I was in SS2. I jumped into Business Administration.

He had wanted to be a pharmacist but the 'other' in the form of a teacher and his peers steered him towards the Arts/social sciences. In retrospect, Ude refers to that decision to go into the Arts/social science as a mistake.

The mistake I made is for me to join the Arts because of the change in teacher. When I was in secondary school, our chaplain then used to advise us to take the hard way instead of the easy way. We didn't understand it that time he was telling us to take the hard way so that things will be easy for us...if I didn't join the Arts students, now I will realise that I am at the right place that I supposed to be. But now I'm seeing a lot of things in life. The mistake I did was to join the Arts.

Therefore, he reiterates again and again that if for any reason he has to rewrite the CEs, he would have nothing to do with the social sciences:

If I'm to re-sit for WAEC now, I will not go for this social science. I will try hard and make sure that I make science subjects...I will go for science subjects".

According to him, the Sciences has more opportunities and prospects when compared to the social sciences, a discovery he made when he checked the prospectus (brochure) for university entry examinations. Hence, his regrets: *I really regret a lot of things because assuming I go for that science, I will be happy.* Reflecting on the possibility of making a complete switch to the sciences at that stage, he understood the implications and expressed a positive belief that it is something he could accomplish if the opportunity presented itself.

It will be hard for me... but it's only by attending lesson and making sure that I cover a lot of things... It will take a lot of time for me to go through the textbooks and past questions and at least visit a lot of teachers that can help me in a lot of things like formula and explanations. It will take time. But with my own determination, I know that I can make it. I can make it if I'm to re-sit.

Despite this desire to still study Pharmacy, Ude does not intend to either re-sit for the exit CEs or make any sacrifice towards pursuing the Pharmacy dream. He'd rather continue on his present path in the social sciences rather than rewrite the exit CEs. For now, we know he is sticking to his plan to study 'Economics and Management' at the university but he doesn't seem to be keen about going onto higher education at that point in time in the first place.

B. If not for "their wish"

Ude's return to the city where I met him preparing for the university entry examination was at the instigation of some of his family members.

> *Some of my other brothers say that I should come back from Abuja and go further in my education. So it's the reason I came back.*

He had spent about two years and some months in Abuja as an apprentice in his brother's clothes and accessories business. The business apprenticeship scheme used to be a popular pathway for many males from the south-eastern part of Nigeria in yesteryears, particularly boys from the Igbo ethnic group. It usually involved a businessman going to his kindred or town and bringing a young boy to 'serve' him and learn the intricacies of whatever business he is into. After the number of years that was agreed with the boy's family, the boy gets his freedom and some money from his 'master' to start up his own business.

This apprenticeship experience affected Ude a great deal. First, it was a learning experience for him.

> *I engaged in the business and the business is moving. I learned some tactics I can use to engage myself in the business. I have a lot of ... these people that come and patronise me.*

Second, the business was a successful one and as a result, he was confronted with another reality of being able to be financially successful without going onto higher education.

> *[Not being in the university] is not a big deal for me because...the experience I got in the past three years I'm in Abuja to know more about the business....if I finish school, If I didn't get job, if I have small money to start a business, I can do it on my own because I've gotten the experience there.*

Thirdly, the experience extended his language horizon and people network because of the variety of people he met on a daily basis.

> *My customers, some of them are Muslims, some Christians...from different tribes of Nigeria. So, I learnt some things. I learnt Hausa Language small. I learnt Yoruba but it's not that much. I learnt Nsukka language and some other languages because … there [are] more tribes there...a lot of people there.*

Fourthly, Ude began to have doubts about the value of education, in the light of unpleasant realities for those who get educated.

if you look at our educational sector now, there are some people that graduated since 2008, no job. Some graduated 2013 and get job immediately. So, if you start thinking about these things you will say that there is no need for education but it's not what I think.

Fifthly, he was enjoying the level of independence, responsibility, popularity as well as the financial security that the apprenticeship programme bestowed on him. This is how he describes it:

When I went to Abuja in 2014, my brother had one shop with one salesgirl then. But with time, he got another shop. I was there. I was the only one in that new shop. Everything about the shop was on my head: the sales book...the receipt.... everything. So, I'm managing the shop as a whole, everything there. Everybody knows me. Even if they meet my brother, they will be asking where am I because of the things I want to sell. So, I enjoyed it.

Against this background, Ude decided to forget about going onto higher education and just focus on completing his apprenticeship and then pursue having his own business. It would take the intervention of some of his other family members to halt his plans in that direction and insist that he pursues higher education. These family members expressed willingness to sponsor his education. His responsibility was just to ensure that he gets the admission. He explains it thus:

As I was doing the business, my mind just shut off from education because the business is moving, and the money is coming. But at a point in time which I don't want to go against all my siblings (their wish for me to go to school), because they said that I should come back, that for me to go to school is not the problem but for me to make my result because they promise that they will sponsor my education to go further. So that's the reason I came back.

If not for his family's wish and insistence on his going onto higher education, Ude disclosed that: "*I would rather stay there*". By 'there', he was referring to staying in Abuja as a business apprentice, completing the apprenticeship programme and going off to start off his own business eventually.

At the time of this interview, it had been two months since Ude returned from Abuja, but he still remembered those times with nostalgia and a longing to go back. He wants to stick with

the business apprenticeship programme but the 'other' in the form of family have steered him into pursuing higher education. Here, we see a contradiction between what Ude really wants and what his other family members want. And we see that he is acting out the script of what his family wants. Of course, it is possible that he may not always feel this way in the future, but we do not know this at this present time.

3. ***If not for my brother***

After secondary school, one of Ude's brothers took him to Abuja to be an apprentice in his business. There was no indication in his narrative that this was what he wanted at the time. In his words:

> *I went to Abuja. I stayed with my brother. I'm helping him in his business.... I've been with him for the past two years and some months. As I was there, he like to leave me there to serve him or to be apprentice. But some of my other brothers say that I should come back from Abuja and go further in my education.*

At the time when his other siblings were requesting for him to return and pursue higher education, this brother who took him to Abuja still wanted him to remain his apprentice. Ude is aware that if he had not gone onto the business apprenticeship programme, he would have been in the university, especially when he sees his friends who went onto higher education unlike him.

> *if I look at my mates in school, some of them are in 2nd year, some are in 1st year. So, the right place I should be now, it should be either 2nd year or 3rd year because I finished my WAEC and NECO since 2014. So the right place I should be now is 2nd year...that's where I should be for now.*

On reflection, Ude is aware of the university experiences he has missed out on, but this is the outcome of him comparing himself with his friends and not necessarily him reflecting on what he really wants. Nonetheless, he expresses no regrets about his stay in Abuja and his taking part in the business apprenticeship programme. Rather, he thinks it is an advantage he has over his peers because of the high index of unemployment in Nigeria. He is very aware that a higher education is not a guarantee for employment

> *It's not a must that if you graduate from school, you get job at once.... there are some civil engineers that.... now they are selling recharge card because of the [unemployment] condition. But for me to… stay in Abuja for the past 3 years, at least if I finish school, If I didn't get job, if I have small money to start a business, I*

can do it on my own because I've gotten....the experience of business and school and if I can learn handwork, I will be more joyful if I learn a good handwork to combine all of them.

By handwork, Ude was referring to acquiring a vocational skill. It is obvious that Ude has a goal of being successful in the future. Therefore, he is very open to any pathway that can make achieving this goal easier, faster and enjoyable, whether it be through the route of education, business apprenticeship or vocational skills. But most importantly, Ude understands the precariousness of the job market and feels that it is wise to be multi-skilled to survive. He is however confident that he would succeed against all odds, with or without a job. In his words: "*even though I graduate, I did not have any job, I know I can succeed*".

Furthermore, while Ude is optimistic about his future, he is also strongly aware of the uncertainty of that future. He holds a deterministic belief that subscribes to a God who determines what is going to be.

For me to see next year, it's in the hands of God. I'm not the owner of my life because it's not the way we think things, it's not the way it happens. It's the way God thinks. So, for now, I cannot say that I will be here or there because I don't know. There are some other people that sit for JAMB for up to three sittings before they got admission. So, for me to say what will be in the next ten years, I don't know. It's how we see life, we face it. So, I don't think I have to say I will be there or there because I don't know what tomorrow will be.

Ude enjoyed strong support from his family network and they seem to have his best interest at heart. We see this in how they regularly and strongly feature in his life narrative. His family network also appears to be financially comfortable. For instance, he mentioned that his brother for whom he was an apprentice for in Abuja used to travel to China to import goods and then travel to Lagos to supply these goods, while owning two boutiques in Abuja. He also had family members who placed a high premium on education. We see this in how one of his brothers paid for his Certificate examinations and took care of everything he needed that period such as textbooks, as well as how they expressed willingness to sponsor his higher education when he returned. Yet, he expressed concern about finances and staying motivated, if he was to go onto higher education.

the challenge will be the finance to buy textbooks and some necessary things so that you will meet what you are aiming at that particular time …. and motivation.

For both finances and motivation, he emphasises the way that the 'other' can be influential.

Appendix 11: Abi's Lived Experience Description

1.0 Questions for this analysis

a) How does Abi make sense of her academic achievement in the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations (CEs)?

b) What consequences does experiencing low academic achievement in the CEs engender for Abi, especially in relation to her educational aspirations?

2.0 PROFILE

Abi, a female, was born on 9th June, 1997. She began senior secondary education in 2013 at the age of 16. She has 7 siblings in total (4 from her late mother and 3 from her stepmother who died in 2016). In January 2015, her maternal aunt brought her to Awka in Anambra state to serve as a house help for a woman; against the backdrop of emerging inter-ethnic conflicts in the North that caused her family to relocate to Anambra State and a sour relationship with her stepmother who she said did not want her. Abi completed her secondary school education in 2016 at the age of 19. Her educational aspiration was to study English language at the undergraduate level and then do a Master's degree programme; in order to become a teacher in a higher institution and a writer. When she wrote the exit CE (WASSCE[19]) in 2016, she had low achievements in the subjects that were crucial for admission into higher education. During the period of this data collection, which held on 2nd May 2017 and 16th May 2017 for the Life-Grid session and semi-structured interview respectively; Abi was preparing for another exit CE (SSCE[20]).

3.0 SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Abi lived with her Father and Stepmother in Niger State, North Central Nigeria when she began senior secondary school (SS) in 2013. In SS1, she had to compulsorily do a wide array

[19] WASSCE is one type of the secondary school exit Certificate examination.

[20] SSCE is another type of the secondary school exit Certificate Examination and it is conducted by NECO (National Examinations council)

of subjects that involved both the Sciences and the Arts. In SS1, her most disliked subjects were Physics and Chemistry. They were also the subjects with her worst performance (E8 grade in both subjects). She disclosed that she knew what she wanted to do in the future by this time, and knew that the Science subjects were irrelevant to her aspirations. In her words: "*I don't have anything to do with Physics also Chemistry, I don't have anything to do with it. So it made me hate it*". By SS2, students could choose their discipline and she chose the Arts. During this period, Mathematics emerged as a subject that she wasn't performing well in and which she said she hated. Mathematics continued to be a difficult challenge for her throughout senior secondary school and until the point she wrote the exit Certificate Examination: *"I faced challenges in Mathematics and many other courses but especially mathematics".*

By the second term of SS2, Abi relocated to Anambra state and continued her education there. From the onset, she experienced challenges with adjusting to the learning expectations and assessment procedures at the new school.

> *When I came to Anambra state, …. the school experience was somehow difficult for me…. The teachers they always come to class and they will give us projects. In Niger state, there is nothing like that. And their examination used to be standard but that of Niger state don't used to be like that.*

Comparing both schooling systems she had been exposed to, she argued that the teachers she had while in Niger State were deficient in their pedagogical abilities: "*though they have teachers but their teachers there, in terms of teaching they cannot teach, they cannot give students what they need".* The exception she noted were the Corp Members[21] who were posted to their school for their National assignment. According to her, it was the Corp members that taught them well but observed that some of them often left the school because it wasn't conducive for them. She recalled informing her father that she wanted to leave that school for another in Niger state, but her father for reasons that may likely be financial did not listen to her.

[21] At the end of University education, graduates who are not yet 30 years old are posted to different parts of the country to serve the country for one year as 'National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)' members.

In addition to Abi's perceived incompetence of the teachers in her school in Niger state, she disclosed that for subjects such as English Language, Literature-in-English and Christian Religious Studies, her school didn't even have teachers. These were subjects that were core to her aspiration to study English Language at the University. Therefore, her first encounter with these subjects happened later in SS2 when she moved to Anambra state.

> *And some courses that we don't offer in my former school, I came here, I have to offer them. And those are the courses I have been disturbing my daddy that I want to, I really need them in my dream, for my course in the university.*

She believed that the issues with her former school contributed to the difficulty she experienced while trying to adjust to the new school.

> *The way I started SS class…. I didn't start it with a very good foundation. So it affected me when I came here.*

She also argued that she would have been better off academically, if her senior secondary school education had begun at Anambra state.

However, Abi contributed in some ways to some of the challenges she faced academically, albeit sometimes due to circumstances beyond her control. For instance, while in SS1, she regularly missed Mathematics classes which held in the morning.

> *What happened then was that Mathematics took place by 7 o clock and I do transport myself to school. Before I get to school, Maths lesson would have passed.*

A similar trend of being late to school and even missing school entirely continued when she moved to SS2 in another state. This time, she attributed it to her living circumstances outside the school environment. Between January to October 2015, she was a domestic help for a woman and describes her stay with this woman as a period she suffered.

> *I suffered many challenges there….. I will work and work and I will be exhausted. I cannot even read my books and I do attend school late. Sometimes I will not go to school. Though she is very very rich. But Sometimes to pay my fees, she will want me to stay at home for some time before she pays my school fees.*

So you have a scenario where she may not attend school on some days, and for the days she does attend school, she is exhausted because of domestic chores. And then she gets back home and cannot give attention to studying because of the domestic chores and exhaustion.

She noted that this situation had an adverse impact on her academic performance. She would however move to another woman's house in October 2015 when she began SS3, also as a domestic help and in the same city. At the time of this data collection, she was still staying with this woman and describes her as her 'guardian' throughout the research. She was also attending extramural lessons to prepare for the second exit CE she was about to write. Throughout this period, her father continued to have a say on decisions that concern her academics even though she wasn't living with him.

4.0 ABI'S EXIT CE EXPERIENCE

When Abi was preparing for the 2016 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), her guardian restricted some of her educational endeavours.

> *When I was preparing for the exam…I was living with my guardian…. She doesn't allow me to attend extra mural lessons and it is in that extra mural lessons that we are taught important things for the exams…. most textbooks I don't have them. I struggled to get what I want for the exam…and sometimes when I'm reading, she stops me.*

She believed that this circumstance limited the extent of her preparation for the exit CE. Nonetheless, she thinks that this guardian has her best interest at heart education-wise as she states below:

> *my guardian that I stay with now, she wants to give me the best. The best she can in my academics… Her plans for me is… that I can further to university.*

She therefore excused her guardian's seemingly uncooperative attitude towards her education as a product of her age and value system. Was Abi making excuses for this guardian because what she was getting this time was a better bargain than what she had been given in the past? This is how she describes it:

> *In that place I faced a lot of challenges there even in my academics. So I wanted to leave that place and by the grace of God. This woman I live with now, she came out in the church that she wants somebody to live with. And she now asked me to come and live with her. So I took the opportunity and go to live with her. I left the other woman alone.*

Fortunately, Abi noted that her guardian was more supportive this time around as she prepared for the second exit CE and attributes this to the guardian's realization of the impact of her previous attitude.

In the 2016 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), Abi obtained E8 in Biology, E8 in English and C5 in Igbo language, which she listed amongst her subjects with the best performance. Subjects with her worst performance included Economics, Government, Literature-in-English and Mathematics; all with the F9 grade. Some of these subjects were crucial to her aspiration to study English Language in the University. In her own words, she '*failed*'. However, this experience of failing the exit CE was not isolated in the sense that her school mates also failed the examination. Her school had organized illegal assistance for their students through examination malpractices, for which students had to pay. Abi's father had advised her not to get involved, so she didn't pay for the assistance. In the examination hall, her classmates who paid even tried to assist her with the illegal assistance they had received but she refused the offer. She explains it thus:

> *[My daddy] said that I should study hard that I should not be involved in malpractice. That I should not wait for anybody to come and give me answer in the hall. So I obeyed him. I didn't…others paid but I didn't pay but my classmates they wanted me to join them even when I didn't pay. But I refused because of my daddy's advice.*

When the examination results were released, despite the illegal assistance received by some, she says that all the students failed the examination. Abi suggests that this was probably because "*our school committed an offence".* Strangely, she does not suggest that this offence may have had anything to do with her result individually by the way she detaches herself: *"They gave them answers. Though after everything all of us failed WAEC".* This is probably because she did not partake in the examination malpractices, she therefore rationalizes that she couldn't have failed because of an offence associated with examination malpractice.

When the WASSCE results were released, Abi was already preparing for the Matriculation examination into the University. Sadly, with her result, she could not qualify for admission,

even if she had passed the Matriculation examination. This realization brought **confusion** for her, with respect to how she would continue to pursue her educational aspiration.

> *I was confused. I don't know where to start because then I was planning, I was preparing for JAMB[22] but seeing the result, I don't know. I don't know what to do again.*

Rewriting the exit CE was the prompt option but the possibility of registering for the exam again appeared bleak because of the financial requirement. She assumed her parents would be unwilling to support her in registering again for another CE: "*When I saw my result, I thought that my parents will not sponsor me to write another one"*. Therefore, she decided to get a job and save up money to register for another CE by herself. "*I made up my mind that I want to go and work and afford the money to write another exam. And this time, with the help of God, I believe that I will pass."* Fortunately, her fear of not getting financial sponsorship was later relinquished because her parents and guardian supported her plans to rewrite the CE. She however recalls that her parents were unhappy with her performance. They "*felt bad…. they blamed me. They said that I didn't study hard and they blamed me most*". In order to rewrite the CE, she had to stop preparing for the University Matriculation exam and focus on preparing to rewrite another exit CE. This time, she registered for the National Examinations Council (NECO)'s Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) rather than the WASSCE. She had wanted to rewrite the WASSCE but by the time her brother could register her, the WASSCE registration had ended. She is very optimistic that her CE results would turn out better this time.

At the time of this data collection, the NECO SSCE was commencing in a month's time. Abi admits that she was really preparing hard: "*For the NECO results, I have told myself and I have prayed to God and I am still working towards it by his grace that I don't want even credits. I want as from B2 upwards."* She has eliminated her involvement with friends and is taking advantage of the absence of school friends in her life: "*Now, no more friends. No more playing with friends in school. Nothing can stop me from reading."* Furthermore, she attends extramural lessons, which was where we met. Strikingly, she also mentioned that "*now I go to church and be praying to God for the exam*"; in response to the question that asked her

[22] JAMB is the board that organizes the Matriculation Examinations into tertiary institutions. In this context, it is used synonymously as the matriculation exams.

how she was preparing for the forthcoming exit CE. It seems that on reflection, she felt that defaulting on her religious obligation of going to church during the previous exam period was unnecessary and perhaps, may have been a contributory factor to how her result turned out. According to her: *"Then I don't go to church. I used to stay at home claiming that I have exam, so I don't have to go to church."* It seems that the previous CE results made her begin to question the priority she gave to her religious obligations to the church while preparing for that exit CE. It is interesting to see how the religious obligation of attending church and praying to God is now factored into her preparations. The church is obviously an important part of her life because her father is a pastor and she even met her present guardian in the church.

Despite all that she is doing currently to prepare, she notes that she could do much more if she could get individual tutoring from people like her elder brothers who don't stay in her vicinity. But she observes that because "*I am staying with my guardian. She will not give me time for that".* Despite this, she remains confident that her hard work and religious belief in God would be fruitful: "*I have no fears because I believe in what God can do for me. So I have no fear. I study. I try my best in studying and I do hope on God. God will help me".* Nevertheless, she is still concerned about Mathematics. She acknowledges that it is still a "*struggle to study Mathematics*" but says she is trying her best:

> *I attend mathematics class and after the class, I go home and revise. Though sometimes when I will be revising, I don't normally understand how it was taught in the class but by his grace, I'm trying my best.*

After rewriting this examination, she intends to continue with her plans to go onto university by writing the Matriculation exam.

5.0 How does Abi make sense of her academic achievement in the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations (CEs)?

a) "I Failed"

> *I failed Literature in English. I failed English Language. I failed Government. I failed Economics…. I remember how I will read my notes…. But yet I failed.*

Abi describes her achievement in the WASSCE as 'failed'. When asked to clarify what she meant by 'failed', she responds by using the grades which normatively described her as having 'failed', to do so: "*I scored English language E8. I scored Mathematics F, Government F. Literature F"*. These were subjects that were crucial to her aspirations to study English Language in the university and career aspirations to become a writer and a lecturer. Characterizing failure this way reflects the conceptualization of failure as "a type of falling short with respect to some normatively characterized activity, task or expectation" (Klenig, 2012, p. 1366). This aligns with how what comes to be interpreted as failure usually emerge from regulations, marking conventions, and social acceptance of what constitutes failure (Birtwistle & Johnson, 1997). Thus, Abi appears to have understood her achievement in the WASSCE in terms of how the marking conventions have construed the grades.

Again, it is striking that Abi asserts personal responsibility for having 'failed' her WASSCE by how she uses the personal pronoun 'I' - '*I failed*', '*I scored*'. This is further established by how she alludes to her culpability on four fronts: Relationships, Educational Foundation, Religious commitment and extra coaching provisions. With regards to relationships, Abi felt her activities with friends affected her preparation for the WASSCE by taking away time that she should have spent reading.

> *Last year when I was preparing for the WAEC, though we are in school…playing with friends and all those school activities, it stopped me from reading.*

Therefore, as she now prepares for another exit CE, she considers it a positive thing that she would no longer get involved in activities with friends since she has left school: "*now, no more friends. No more playing with friends in school. Nothing can stop me from reading*". With regards to her educational foundation, Abi felt that the kind education she got from SS1 crippled her achievement in later years: "*The way I started SS class…. I didn't start it very well. I didn't start it with a very good foundation. So, it affected me when I came here."* She

illustrates this by how she alludes to her persistent difficulty in Mathematics has been a result of "*no foundation from SS1"*. With regards to her religious commitment, Abi felt that her defaulting towards church activities when she was preparing for her exams may not have helped with her results. Therefore, as she prepares for another exit CE, she is remedying that: "*then I don't go to church. I used to stay at home claiming that I have exam, so I don't have to go to church but now I go to church and be praying to God for the exam".* Finally, Abi felt that her low participation in extra coaching classes, sometimes due to reasons associated with her living conditions, constrained her level of preparation for the WASSCE, eventually contributing to her 'failed' situation.

b) "I was Confused"

"*When I saw it, I couldn't believe it was my result*. *I was confused.*"

Abi's WASSCE result came as a shock to her, which then put her in a state of confusion. The shock emanated from how she felt that she adequately prepared for the examination, despite the challenges she had experienced while she prepared for the examination. According to her:

> *I remember the way I used to study then. I remember how I will read my notes. Some that I don't understand, I do cram them. But yet I failed…. I tried my possible best to attend extra mural lessons and I do study in the night though I don't stay awake up till 1 to 2 like that. But I do have vigils in my study.*

She recalls that she was very confident before the exams that she was going to do well in it but was unfortunately disappointed: "*I believed in myself that I have written something that I will pass. But surprisingly, I didn't pass"*. Another thing that shocked her about the WASSCE results stemmed from how her best performance was in a subject (Igbo language), that she felt she wasn't proficient in and had only began to study in school about a year before the WASSCE, while failing the ones she had high expectations for: "*I scored most in Igbo language which I don't know why. The subjects I expected to pass, I see myself failing them*." Although this subject with her best performance - Igbo language is her mother tongue and

she speaks it well, it seems that she considered her indigenous knowledge of the language inadequate enough to warrant a C5 grade in.: "*I scored C5 in Igbo language and it's not that I can write Igbo, because I didn't study it from JS1 to SS2."* This development in the way her WASSCE result turned out, put her in a state of confusion because she had begun preparation for the matriculation examination into higher institutions, since she expected the WASSCE result to be good.

> When I saw it, I couldn't believe it was my result. I was confused. I don't know, even I don't know where to start because then I was planning, I was preparing for JAMB but seeing the result, I don't know. I don't know what to do again.

Being confronted with the unpleasant WASSCE result, her major confusion bordered around how she was going to proceed with her educational aspirations in the face of the setback. As earlier noted, she eventually made a decision to rewrite the CE and suspend preparations for the university matriculation examination. The immediate challenge then became how to fund re-writing the exam. When she thought her parents/guardian would not be supportive of her rewriting the exam, she decided she would get a job: "*I made up my mind that I want to go and work and afford the money to write another exam"*. Fortunately, she didn't have to because her guardian paid for the exam.

6.0 What consequences do low academic achievement in the CEs engender FOR Abi, especially in relation to her educational aspirations?

A. Increased effort to succeed

> *I increased my mode of reading and I attend lesson unlike last year, and my guardian also supports me.*

Abi's experience of low achievement in the WASSCE has engendered a sense of increased commitment and effort in her towards her studies. She is taking responsibility for her learning and actively self-regulating her preparation for the next exam. As earlier mentioned, she is cutting off from friends and friend-related activities. She is reading

more. She is attending extra coaching lessons more. She is attending church more in order to pray for God's help. Most importantly, her guardian who used to restrict her attendance of extra coaching lessons now supports her and lets her do most of what she needs to do as she prepares for another exam. Her guardian is still restrictive though because Abi mentions that she wished she could have access to her elder brothers and teachers for one-on-one academic assistance but notes that her guardian would not give her time for that.

B. Deference to faith / religious inclinations

> *For the NECO results, I have told myself and I have prayed to God and I am still working towards it by his grace that I don't want even credits. I want as from B2 upwards.*

Abi's experience of low achievement in the WASSCE has engendered in her a tacit acknowledgement that success is not entirely within her control. That is, she now subscribes to the superiority of a higher power (God) in ensuring that she succeeds. We see this in how she evaluates her involvement in church activities during the last time she was preparing for exam and draws her own lesson.

> *Then I don't go to church. I used to stay at home claiming that I have exam, so I don't have to go to church but now I go to church and be praying to God for the exam.*

Although, she believed that increased effort towards her preparation would ensure success this time, she also believed that this success would only happen with the help of God.

> This time, with the help of God, I believe that I will pass. That what happened then, will not happen again.

This tacit acknowledgement of God's role in ensuring success for her gives her motivation and confidence that her result would fare better this time around.

> *I have no fears because I believe in what God can do for me. So I have no fear. I study. I try my best in studying and I do hope on God. God will help me.*

This deference to God can be traced to how despite all the effort she put in the last examination, her achievement shocked and confused her. She may therefore have

rationalised that the missing link was the God factor, hence, her commitment to ensuring that the God factor is duly addressed this time around.

C. Delay to Educational Progress / aspirations

> I was hoping that by this time this year, that I will be, I will have written JAMB and waiting for admission in the university.

When the WASSCE results were released, Abi was already preparing for the university Matriculation examination. Her plan was that in five years' time, she would have graduated from studying English language at the undergraduate level of a University and already studying for a master's degree:

> by five more years to come, I would have graduated from university and I will be doing my Masters in order to be a lecturer.

While she still stays committed to her aspiration "to study English language and come out to be a teacher, be a writer and also be a lecturer", her low achievement in the WASSCE has initiated a temporal delay to her plans, at least by one year. Now she must focus on passing the exit CE she is rewriting, after which she would resume preparation for the University Matriculation exam that would hold the next year.

7.0 DISCUSSION

The High-stakes CE is not a level playing ground for those who are assessed. Structurally, it disenfranchises students who haven't had access to good education through no fault of theirs, except that they are on the wrong side of the socioeconomic ladder. Galtung (1969) notes that with structural violence, "the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (p. 171) Abi began secondary school education in a school that lacked teachers in some subjects that were important to her aspiration. As a result, she encountered the subjects for the first time in the second term of SS2. Yet she must be assessed uniformly in these subjects with people who have had the privilege of good schooling system, good teachers, possibly better infrastructural provisions.

Another way that Abi was disenfranchised is the limitations she experienced towards attending or getting extra lessons. Throughout her narrative, we see how she attributes this limitation as contributory to her low achievement. Attending extra lessons beyond the school mainstream lessons seems to be an important currency for ensuring better achievement in the High stakes examinations.

8.0 CONCLUSION

We have seen how Abi made sense of her academic achievement in the WASSCE by regarding it as a 'Failed' performance and taking personal responsibility for this performance. This failed performance was a shock to her and put her in a state of confusion with regards to how she was going to proceed with achieving her educational aspiration. Although this failed performance has engendered increased commitment and effort on her part towards achieving success, it has also fostered in her a belief that her success does not entirely depend on her effort. God's help is also needed and prayers must be made to solicit for this help. Most importantly, her 'failed' performance in the WASSCE has introduced a temporal delay to her educational aspirations, at least by one year.

Appendix 12: Chi's Lived Experience Description

1.0 PROFILE SUMMARY

Chi, a female, was born on 11th December 1998. She lived with both of her parents, 1 older male sibling and 5 younger siblings. She attended a Fee paying Missionary secondary school, which she completed in 2016 at the age of 18. She sat for only the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) when she should have been in SS2, on the instigation of her Father and the precedent set by her elder brother. Fortunately, she obtained Credit grades and above in all the subjects she sat for. At the time of the data collection, she was preparing for her first attempt to write the University Matriculation Examination (UME). The course she aspires to study at the University is 'Banking and Finance'. She desires to be a University graduate and to eventually be a PhD degree holder. She is very optimistic about her educational future because according to her: "*I've already prepared for it. I don't think it's going to be difficult for me".* She plans to get a job immediately after her undergraduate education, working in a bank.

2.0 SECONDARY SCHOOL SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE

Chi asserts that she loved English Language and it was her "*best subject*". She thinks that her love for English Language as a subject has something to do with how her Father was an English Language teacher and jokingly wonders "*if it's an inheritance*". She did not however reflect similar sentiments for Mathematics, a subject she said made her "*so frustrated"* and gave her "*sleepless nights"*. Although, she described Mathematics as "*a big burden",* she noted that it motivated her to work very hard at the subject and was rewarded by a good grade at the WASSCE. Nonetheless, she continues to have "*difficulties in Mathematics"* as she prepares to write it again in the UME. She attributes her challenge in Mathematics to her Mathematics teacher. However, it is not only in Mathematics that she blamed teachers for her unsatisfactory experience with a subject. For instance, the Literature-in-English teacher was "*not good in teaching*", and so she couldn't "*understand anything*". The teacher in Data Processing is not "*calm*" and taught with "*harshness",* which engendered fear in her that prevented her from understanding the subject.

3.0 HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS

When Chi was in SS1, her higher education aspiration was to study for a Law degree. The motivation to study Law emerged from a family dispute over the possession of a Landed property, which lasted for 8 years. The case was taken to court and her Father lost the case. The loss of the case made a huge impact on her as she recounts in detail the day her Father lost the case:

> *I can remember the day that my father came back, saying that they won the case. My senior brother he was with his phone pressing when he heard the news. He broke his phone. He fell down crying as if the world ended. But My father had to encourage him.*

For her personally, she said that the sad news caused her to become "*so depressed"* that she made up her mind to "*be a lawyer"* so she could reopen the case in the nearest future and "*take charge*".

Several incidents would however conspire together to make her decide that a Law degree wasn't for her. First, she was having difficulty understanding Literature-in-English, the core subject for anyone that wanted to do Law. Second, her father discouraged her from pursuing after a Law degree because he had enormous doubts about her ability to obtain the UME cut-off score for Law, which is always very high. This view was supported by an uncle of hers that studied Law who also insisted that getting admission into Law and succeeding in it eventually was "*not an easy task*". Then there was the unpleasant experience of a peer who completed secondary school five years earlier than she did. The peer who also aspired to do a Law degree, had been unable to pass Literature-in-English in the WASSCE and UME for three years. Although the peer eventually passed Literature-in-English, she was still unable to get admission into Law by the time Chi completed secondary school. Since Chi did not "*want to experience the same thing"* that the peer experienced, she decided that she did not want to do Law anymore. She changed her higher education aspiration from Law to Banking and Finance. Choosing Banking and Finance emerged from how a teacher called her a Banker since she was in primary school because the teacher felt that Chi "*behaves like a Banke*r". This

appeared to be a good enough motivation for Chi although she asserts that she is "*determined*" to excel in the course. Elsewhere, Chi reflects that if Mathematics had continued to give her problems, going back to pursue Law was an option she would consider because the course content did not involve Mathematics, unlike Banking and Finance.

4.0 HIGH-STAKES EXAMINATION EXPERIENCE

Chi sat for only the WASSCE, which meant that the pressure to do well at all cost was higher for her. This pressure came particularly from her Father, who even threatened that he would never sponsor the rewriting of the examination but would rather take her to be an apprentice for a vocational trade. She describes the experience thus:

> *I worked very hard to make sure that I didn't get anything like P mostly. I don't want P in my result. And even if I get to get P, my daddy will be very upset with me. Do you know what my daddy always says to me? If you fail your WAEC, I will never register it for the second time. I will just take you to any workshop even if it is hair making or dress making. You will go there and learn how to make dress or hair. So I need to work very hard to make sure I didn't fail it. Because we are 7 in number….to pay our school fees is not easy. So, I had to read very hard to make sure I didn't rewrite my WAEC.*

While this must have been a motivation to give her best to the WASSCE, one cannot overlook the amount of pressure it put on her. If she had written the NECO SSCE alongside the WASSCE, it could have reduced this pressure, but Chi did not register for the NECO SSCE. The choice not to do the NECO SSCE alongside the WASSCE was also instigated by her Father, who argued that "*NECO is only used in Nigeria*" and convinced Chi that it wasn't going to be useful for her.

For Chi, preparing for the WASSCE was very intense. Considering that she wrote this exam when she should have been in SS2, the demands placed on her within a shorter time frame was enormous. In addition to combining SS2 and SS3 academic requirements during the regular school hours, she attended "*private lessons"* after school. Her school seemed to have provided them with good teachers during the time they were preparing for the exams, because she recalls how the Principal often asked for feedback about teacher performance and was always willing to change any teacher that students complained about. Furthermore,

she mentioned that the principal ensured that teaching resources for practical subjects like the computers and sewing machines were available. Yet, Chi still attended private lessons suggesting that the provisions of the school was inadequate, or she just felt she needed extra help.

For her personal preparations, she "*read very hard*" and even stayed "*awake in the night to read [while] others will be watching TV*". Her siblings supported her by taking over her house chores and helping her wash her school uniforms. Her father, being an English Language teacher, assisted her with how to write letters and essays, a core aspect of the English language examination. She also belonged to a reading group of 5 girls who regularly met together to read, work on assignments and solve questions. During these times, Chi reported that she "*was scared"* and had so much "*fear"* because she "*thought the exam [was] going to be so difficult*" for her. She recalls that the teachers repeatedly told them "*If you don't read hard, you will fail*". Her father wasn't helping matters as he would tell her brother who was making effort to calm Chi down, to "*shut up [and] let her read*". When she later wrote the exam, she found that her fear was totally unnecessary. According to her, "*I found out that it was not …. as hard as they were saying it*". However, considering all the preparations she had made and all the support networks she enjoyed, it is not surprising that she didn't find the examination difficult.

Despite these, Chi was still anxious about her result. When she heard that the WASSCE result had been released, she panicked:

> *When I was told that WAEC result was out, I started having, it's like my blood pressure was high. I started thinking. I know in other subjects I tried my best and I know what I write. But…*

Mathematics was the subject that gave her the most concern because a good grade in it was crucial to her getting admission and going onto higher education to study Banking and Finance. According to Chi, "*when I was preparing for WAEC, I was afraid if I will pass my Maths because Maths is the major thing I'm going to study".* Fortunately, she passed Mathematics with a C4 grade, which gave her "*confidence"* because she reasoned that "*If I pass Maths,*

nothing else can push me back. Nothing else can hinder me from taking it…if I have passed it in WAEC, I can also make it in other exams". English Language was also another source of concern to her because her father told her that what she wrote was inadequate for success. She described the experience thus:

> *my daddy will tell me English is not only all about what you wrote but It depends on how careful you are in it. I know that I'm good at English. But they keep scaring me ……even the letter I wrote, I said I'm sure of the letter. But my dad read the letter because I wrote it at the back of my question paper. My daddy read the letter and said…. this thing is not even going to lead you to anywhere. So I became so much depressed. I was like I'm going to fail it.*

She would however go onto pass English Language with a B3 grade and made good grades in the other subjects she sat for. Her result made her so ecstatic. Aside from Mathematics where she had a C4, the rest were As and Bs. She described how:

> *when I got my result, I was even shouting on the main road…like a mad man. When I got home, my daddy asked me 'Mad person, what is it?'. [Laughs] I gave him the result. He congratulated me and told my junior ones to follow the footsteps that I did. My mummy was not actually home that time. When she came back, she was very happy. She said at least the money I spent (on) you were not in vain.*

It is obvious that her parents were proud of her achievement that her dad had to use her as a positive example for his other kids to emulate. The mother's reference to money isn't surprising because Chi herself in describing the pressure on her to pass the WASSCE, had mentioned that "*Because we are 7 in number….to pay our school fees is not easy*".

5.0 EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

The secondary school that Chi attended had zero tolerance to examination malpractices. Chi believes that it is because it is a Christian Missionary school, which suggests that they hold high standards of morality. Chi explains as follows:

> *Our school always say that anything you do is for yourself. You know it's a missionary school. They will tell you that they don't put their hand in anything like*

expo[23]. That's what they will tell you. Even if you came in the exam hall with any expo, the school will punish you first before the supervisors will even come.

Because of this, students who were interested in engaging in examination malpractices often left the school to register for the exit CEs in the schools that tolerate and commercialise examination malpractices. Chi narrates how two of her friends made the choice to register in another school that tolerated and commercialised exam malpractices. While one of them was successful and made good results, the other friend's result was seized because the school was caught and penalised. In Chi's opinion, this other friend was simply "*unlucky"*. This goes to illustrate the risks associated with engaging in examination malpractices, yet many students willingly take that risk every year. Even Chi was tempted by these friends to also leave her school and register in such shady schools, but her Father sternly refused, insisting that Chi wrote her WASSCE in the Missionary school. She recounts the experience thus:

*my friends – ***** and ****, They were telling me 'why are you suffering yourself? Let's change school. They will help us. They will even type the answers for you to write.' When I thought about it, that's when I told my daddy that I wanted to change school. When my daddy said I will never change any school. Then I started reading hard. By then my friends have left the school already.*

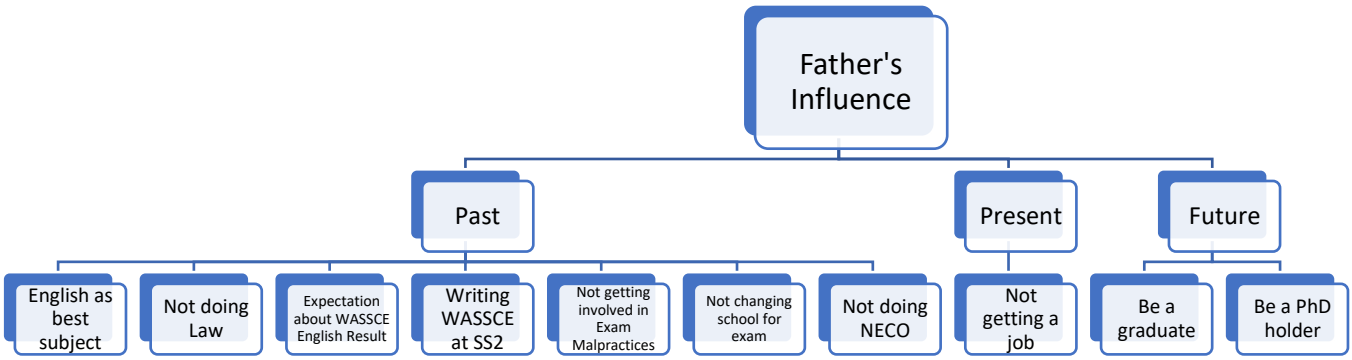
It is quite ironic that Chi had the capacity to do well in the exams without engaging in any malpractices. This can also be extrapolated to many students who engage in malpractices because of either the pressure to do well in the exit CEs at all cost or an undermining of what they are capable of.

6.0 FATHER'S INFLUENCE

Chi's father played a very influential role in her decision making about her educational and career future. This influential role of her 'Daddy' on her, especially through his words (advice, instruction, rebuke, criticism, teases) reverberates loudly throughout her narrative. She did not mention her mother in anyway except when she was specifically asked about her mother's reaction to her examination result. Prior to this, it was easy to assume that her

[23] Expo is the street lingo for examination malpractices.

mother was deceased. The mother's seeming absence in her narrative might just mean a physical absence necessitated by Time and Space. Her father's influence is summarised in the image below:



Appendix 13: Isa's Lived Experience Description

1.0 Question for this analysis

How does Isa make sense of his academic achievement in the secondary school exit Certificate Examinations (CEs)?

2.0 PROFILE

Isa, a male, was born on 16th December 1997. His data collection sessions held on 14th February 2017 for the Life-Grid session and 24th February 2017 for the second Interview session. During this period, he was 19 years old, had completed secondary school the previous year and was preparing for the university entrance examination. His father was deceased, and he lived with his aunty. He spends most of his time assisting his aunty in her shop business.

3.0 EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Isa was very emphatic and consistent about his aspirations to join the Military throughout the educational levels on the Life grid. According to him, his interest in the Military began when he was in primary school and his mum even told him that as a child, he spoke a lot about the Military. He attributes his early and persistent interest in the Military to a history of family members who joined the Military or the Police Force.

> *My grandfather was a Force Man. A military man. And my Father was also a Military man before the war broke, I mean the Civil war. He now joined the Nigerian Army and later on retired. My senior brother was I think must be a Captain by now in the Nigerian Army…My brother another one is in Police, Anambra State command…I also have other members of my family which include my in-laws, niece who are into Force. So, I just want myself there. I just start liking Force. Right from time.*

This Military aspiration also came out strongly throughout his interviews with statements which alluded that if he didn't go into the Military, he didn't think he would "*exist in this world*" and emphasising that "*If not Military, nothing else*". He however acknowledges that it was difficult to get entry into the regular combatant route of the Military, hence, he had an alternative plan that involved him getting into the Military after a mainstream university

education through the direct Short Service route. This was the reason why he was currently preparing for the mainstream university entry examinations.

> *I'm preparing for JAMB right now. So after the JAMB, I've also registered online for the NDA which is the Nigerian Defence Academy. So I will by the grace of God, if I get admitted there, I will study there…. you know this NDA of a thing. It's just that you won't rely on NDA because it's hard to get. It's hard to get. So if I didn't get that admission in NDA, probably I will be going to UNIZIK, that is*, *University.*

In terms of his educational aspirations, Isa is clear and passionate about doing 'Political Science' or its equivalent: "*The course I will like to read in the University is Political Science but in NDA, it is Political Science and Social Defence''.* He attributes this interest in Political science to a dream to go into Politics and governance in the future, which was fuelled by how he knew prominent Nigerians (actually mentioned four of them) who studied the course.

> *…when I was about entering into SS1, So I just think of the course because I know prominent Nigerians who read that course… I always want to be into Government.*

Furthermore, he has considered the possibility of not being offered admission to do Political Science. In such a situation, he says he would go for 'International Relations': *"if I don't get this Political Science…. I decided within myself that I will be going for international relations".* It is particularly instructive to note that the choice of 'International Relations' as an alternative course of study was connected to how it also had utility in politics and governance, just like 'Political Science': "*if I'm to read Political Science I can go into government and if I'm to read International relationship (sic), I can also go into government with that".* He pinpoints embezzlement of funds, owing of public servants' salaries and poor development as the issues he hopes to address if he gets into governance. In addition, he highlights female gender discrimination in the political arena as another issue he hopes to correct if the opportunity presents itself. He describes the situation thus:

> *Within men, there is this discrimination of a thing that women shouldn't talk or look into what belongs to the men. So actually*, *men do believe that ruling is theirs while women have to be at home taking care of the children or the rest. So*, *there is this discrimination of a thing that if a woman wants to contest like a Presidential election or let me say Governorship election, if there are about 5 candidates and it's only one female that is contesting. The men will not allow the lady to participate. Rather*, *she will be participating with her party you understand. But if there is a way, of course there is always a way*, *the men hinder the women… it has been there that the men rule the world.*

He asserts that he 'wants to correct' this situation where females are discriminated against and underrepresented in the political arena because he believes that they are capable of making a difference when given the opportunity. He recalls that he had put forth this argument on social media and while the females seem to agree with him, some of his male friends said it was '*rubbish and trash'* talk but he is not deterred. It is however intriguing that the Military which he aspires to is a system where females are also discriminated against and are grossly under-represented. On their website, the Nigerian Defence Academy (2017a) state that their annual cadets' intake for the Regular Combatant Course is 175, of which 155 are males and 20 are females.

Despite this, Isa is very aware that going into Politics and governance is a dream that may likely not materialise because of the structural obstacles in Nigeria's political terrain. He explains it thus:

> *If I graduate, if I don't have people in the government, that will be an obstacle to me. You can't easily go there. You must have a godfather or a sponsor who has been there…so I don't think I can easily go there except by [God's] grace.*

Throughout Isa's narrative, his aspiration to join the Military remains steadfast as he continues to make it his life pursuit even if he has to go through the mainstream university first: "*if I graduate from the University, I have to go into the Military and serve my Fatherland for 35 years''.* It is therefore not surprising that when asked about his alternative plans if his Military aspiration did not go as envisaged, he affirms that it was not a possibility he had considered because "*if I'm not to go into the Military, there won't be Me*". Isa's commitment to a future in the Military must be an attribute that the NDA would appreciate.

4.0 HOW DOES ISA MAKE SENSE OF HIS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EXIT CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS (CES)?

Isa attained Credit grades or above in all the subjects he registered for at the 2016 WASSCE except for the Literature-in-English where he obtained an E8 grade. Fortunately, this deficiency was rectified in the 2016 NECO SSCE where he got a Credit grade in Literature-in-English. He had also attained Credit grades or above in all the subjects at the 2016 NECO SSCE except for Agriculture where he had a D7. This deficiency in Agriculture was made up for in the 2016 WASSCE, although Agriculture is not included amongst the core subjects that are pre-requisites for his aspirations. As with mainstream university entrance requirements, going to the Nigerian Defence Academy also stipulates that applicants must attain a minimum of Credit grades in 5 or more subjects that must include English Language and Mathematics, at not more than two examination sittings (Nigerian Defence Academy, 2017b).

When Isa saw his result in the 2016 WASSCE, he was ecstatic: "*I was like wow! I was just proud of myself… I was excited…because I made my result".* He also recalled been surprised by the results because he felt he didn't read so much but obtained 4 'B' grades and 4 'C' grades. He explained that he didn't read so much because of his experience in the first examination paper he wrote, which convinced him that the WASSCE questions weren't worth going overboard for while preparing. This is how he describe that incident:

> *I stayed awake reading. I only had 2 hours of sleep before I prepared going to exam that day … the first examination I took was Data Processing…while writing the WAEC, I saw that the questions there were familiar to me. … I now decided within myself that if the data processing [were] familiar questions to me, the [remaining] subjects will be the same. So*, *I didn't bother to read as much as I did in Data Processing.*

Against this background, he was happy about the WASSCE result generally although getting an E8 in Literature-in-English was very unsettling for him. This was because he didn't know if it was going to have an impact on his educational aspiration to do Political Science or International Relations at the Tertiary level.

> *my dream course is Political Science. So, when I saw the result, I didn't make the literature in English. I was like, can I get this admission, as in the course I want to*

read in University? So, while looking at the result, as in the literature in English, I was not happy with it.

This was the reason why before 2016 NECO SSCE results were released, he was "*a little bit afraid"*. Fortunately, he made up for the Literature-in-English with a Credit grade in the NECO SSCE, although he considers the WASSCE result a better one because of the quality of the grades across all the other subjects. This seemingly better achievement in the WASSCE than in the NECO SSCE surprised him because he insists that he prepared more for the NECO SSCE than the WASSCE, yet he had better achievement in the WASSCE.

Isa argues that his better achievement in the WASSCE was due to WAEC being more rigorous in its marking procedures since it is an international (West African) examination agency: "*WAEC - they are being marked within the country anyway but after the marking, they do examine it outside the country to see if there is any error in that".* He argues that the same cannot be said about NECO SSCE marking procedures. He assumed that since NECO SSCE was conducted by an indigenous examination agency, there would definitely be problems like a lack of rigorousness in how the examination papers are marked. According to him:

We are in Nigeria. Corruption is always there. [For] people who are marking this result, it's a day's job and a day's pay. If you can be able to mark up to like 20 candidates. They will pay you according to the candidates you marked. So, *the markers*, *those who are given the result to mark, they are like, 'let me be marking, so that my money will be coming'. That is why they do mark it anyhow, indiscriminately. …if it was marked accordingly, as in under the supervision of other people, I think my result would have been better than this WAEC*.

It is interesting to see how Isa feels that the better achievement (in the WASSCE) was a reflection of his performance in the examination but the lower achievement (in the NECO SSCE) was a reflection of inconsistencies in the marking procedures of the examination agency. One wonders if he would have made sense of his achievement in the same way if the level of achievement were reversed between the two examination types.

Nonetheless, Isa takes ownership of his performance in the examination, such that, even when he assumes that an examination agency was indiscriminate in their marking procedures, it stems from a confidence that his performance in the examination was good enough to warrant success. Although this confidence wasn't strong before the exam as he reports that he kept wondering if he would succeed. However, after sitting for his first examination paper on 1st April 2016, his confidence about succeeding became strong. He describes it thus:

> *I actually know that the question that will be asked will include things we had been taught…. But I was like can I make this result.... after my first day in writing the exam, that was Data Processing. That was 1st April 2016. So, after the exam, I said to myself, there is nothing there in the exam. Just question and answer.*

Isa's confidence stemmed from how he had really prepared hard for the exams. He attended a popular Government school in his locality with a historical record of students' high achievement and which had a Principal that was intolerant to examination malpractices. In addition to the school's mainstream lessons, he attended extra lessons in the afternoons and even on Saturdays. Then, he and three of his friends formed a group called S.K.A.M, which was generated from the combination of the first letters of their nicknames. He recalled that he bought examination past questions and in this group, they would solve the past questions together. At the end of the day, all of them in the group did well in the exams except for one of them who failed Mathematics in the WASSCE but may have got a Credit in it in the NECO SSCE.

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Appendix 14: Themes From 5 Research Participants Interview Transcripts

UDE	ADA	KAM	AME	MAS
Agency for learning	A Pawn for another	Just clocked 18 years 11 days prior, therefore making him eligible to be interviewed.	English as Liked and best performing subject in SS1	Began SSS in 2010
Content as a factor in subject experience	Financial Challenges	MUM IMPOSED DECISION: He did not choose to do the NABTEB exam of his own volition	ASPIRATION IN SS1: Medical Doctor	All Subject disciplines COMPULSORILY done in SS1
Gender as experience descriptors	Personal choices in academics	MUM IMPOSED DECISION: Mum decided what exam to write and when to write it.	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Dad's wish from childhood	FREEDOM OF DISCIPLINARY CHOICE IN SS2
Instrumental value of aspiration	Subject experience influence on disciplinary choice	MUM IMPOSED DECISION: He was obligated to comply to parental authority	ASPIRATION IN SS1: 'Study hard" – Dad's Recipe	HE DID INTERDISCIPLINARY SUBECTS IN SS1
Intrinsic value of aspirations	Transitions	LEAVING COMFORT ZONE: He was still a student in one school but temporarily had to leave for another school to write NABTEB	ASPIRATION IN SS1: Complying with Dad's wish	CHOOSING SCIENCE: An independent decision
media Influence on Aspirational choice	Critical Events _ turning points	EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE EXAM OPTIONS: NABTEB was not done in his school. They went the extra mile to negotiate and write another examination.	CRUSHED SS1 ASPIRATION: With time, the Medical Doctor project "didn't later work". Time showed that reading hard was not enough to sustain the aspiration.	CHOOSING SCIENCE: Academic performance

non-use of professional career counselling	Faded Dreams	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: School does not offer NABTEB in their repertoire of examinations	CRUSHED SS1 ASPIRATION: Problem with Chemistry. "I WAS NOT DOING GOOD"	CHOOSING SCIENCE: An early decision
Peer influence on aspirational choice	School characteristics	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: School does not register SS2 students for SS3 exams	RENEWED INTEREST IN CHEMISTRY: Is being a medical doctor still possible?	CHOOSING SCIENCE: Emerged from interest in "scientific things and engineering stuff"
Peer Pressure	The significance of the 'Other'	MUM IMPOSED DECISIONS: Reasons are not always provided for the one on whom it was imposed. Of course, there would always be a reason, it's just that parent may not provide clear justification for that to the one who gets imposed to do something.	CRUSHED SS1 ASPIRATION: A renewed interest in chemistry in SS3 was too late to pursue being a medical doctor.	CHOOSING SCIENCE: A deliberate wholehearted choice
Personal Likes	LIFE HISTORY	MUM IMPOSED DECISION: These decisions are often thought to be in the interest of the person who was asked to write the exam. Mum did not ask him if he wanted to or if he could, considering that he was in SS2. Mum probably assumed that he could perhaps base on previous accomplishments and/or perceived capabilities of his son. But then we see her motive: she has perceived a connection between	CHANGED ASPIRATION: Engineering	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Engineering in SS1

		NABTEB results and studying Aviation outside the country. FOUR implications here: 1st is that Aviation was not a degree programme available in Nigeria. 2nd, Kamsy wanted to study Aviation. 3rd, if Kamsy wanted Aviation, Mum was willing to send her son outside Nigeria to accomplish that. 4th, If Mum is willing to send Son outside Nigeria to further his education, it is probably because she is financially able to do so. Thereby suggesting that Kamsy comes from a financially comfortable family.		
Positive affinity to a subject	Certificate Exams' experiences only	UNCERTAIN EXAM OUTCOMES: Before he wrote the exam, there was an implicit acceptance that passing the exam was a probability.	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: Maths, Physics and Chemistry all through senior secondary school	ENGINEERING ASPIRATION: emerged from A childhood interest
Renegotiating a botched aspiration	Certificate Exams' experiences only\PREPARATIONS	STUDYING AVIATION: For Kamsy, studying aviation was a GIVEN. The issues was where? So, writing the NABTEB was just a measure put in place in anticipation of the possible requirements if studying aviation would have to take place outside Nigeria	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: “not good in calculations”	ENGINEERING ASPIRATION: Supported by good performance in the Sciences

Review of Teacher's pedagogy	Certificate Exams' experiences only\RESULTS	AVIATION – A CHILDHOOD DREAM: A dream that has survived about 14 years of formal education and life experiences.	MATHEMATICS: Positive vibes about learning maths	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Mechanical Engineering
Role model influence on aspirational choice	Teacher Teaching experiences	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Objects that fascinates him. Aeroplanes, moon, space…etc. It all began by seeing aeroplanes and being fascinated by them	MATHEMATICS: how Teacher taught made learning difficult	A financially strapped childhood
Time as a factor in subject experience	Influential People	STUDYING AVIATION: A childhood fascination with aeroplanes that marvelled a mum. A fascination that the mum took as a strong indicator of what was to be.	MATHEMATICS: Put in effort to learn	Childhood engineering activities
Unhappy about aspirational change	Career Aspirations	OTHER ASPIIRATIONAL DESIRES: Considered being an astronaut briefly because of fascination with the astronautical space. Considering the relationship between Aviation and Astronauts, one can deduce that Kamsy's aspirations are a product of his childhood fascination with what lies beyond in space	MATHEMATICS: Learning Maths "was difficult"	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: Govt and Lit

Unwilling to resit CEs	Examination Malpractices	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: A teacher who helped a child articulate for the first time what he wanted to do and who also validated that aspiration	MATHEMATICS: Friendship with Teacher influenced performance	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: Blaming the teacher
Critical Events _ turning points	Educational Aspirations	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: A mother who believed in her son's childhood dreams and continued to validate that dream. She was the one who also initiated his writing the NABTEB exam in case he had to go abroad to study.	MATHEMATICS: Extramural class connected to some students doing well in Maths	CHOOSING SCIENCE: I LIKE SCIENCE
Faded Dreams	Post-secondary school endeavours	CAREER ASPIRATIONS: Three different but somehow related aspirations. An underlying belief that he can be all of these at the same time. This suggests a high sense of self-confidence	MATHEMATICS: Positive vibes about being taught	CHOOSING SCIENCE: Putting all effort
School characteristics	Secondary school experience	OTHER ASPIRATIONAL DESIRES	MATHEMATICS: "I couldn't cope"	CHOOSING SCIENCE: Friendly teachers
The significance of the 'Other'	Subjects' experiences	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Societal change and demands	MATHEMATICS: Learning by personal effort	BEST TEACHER: Chemistry Teacher
Certificate Exams' experiences only\PREPARATIONS		ASPIRATIONAL INFLLUENCE: Economic value/potential/benefit	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: "involved calculations"	BEST TEACHER: She addressed the Affective domain
Certificate Exams' experiences only\RESULTS		ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Media – Broadcast and the Internet	ASPIRATION CONSISTENCY TILL SS3: Be a Medical Doctor	Better performance in SS1 Physics than SS1 Chemistry

Teacher Teaching experiences		ASPIRATION INFLUENCE: Marketability and potential	ASPIRATION CONSISTENCY: "was my Zeal"	Chemistry as best performing subject in SS3
Career Aspirations		ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: A teacher who outlined the possibilities in choosing a career path.	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Mother's option	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: BIOLOGY
Examination Malpractices		INSPIRED BY MUM: A mum who believes in her son, who consistently tells him he can be whatever. A mentor.	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Childhood fascination with "electric stuff"	School experience: we work together
Educational Aspirations		INSPIRED BY MUM: He believes because mum believes it too. A strong affiliation to mum. Respect? Love? Relationship?	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Mother's decision for Electrical Engineering	School experience: Peer learning
Post-secondary school endeavours		RE-PRIORITIZING ASPIRATIONS: Computer science will now come before Aviation.	ASPIRATIONAL CHOICE: Bought into mum's idea. He did not mention buying into daddy's idea of being a medical doctor	ASPIRATION CONSISTENCY: Engineering
Secondary school experience		RESEARCHING ASPIRATIONS: Computer science is a more realistic and feasible option	ASPIRATIONAL CHOICE: Mum's option coincides with personal interest	ASPIRATION CROSSROAD: Mechanical or Agric Engineering
Subjects' experiences		STUDYING AVIATION: Doubts about job opportunities for a pilot	CHANGED ASPIRATION: A decision to take Mum's path vs a decision to read hard for Daddy's wish.	CRITICAL EVENT: Problem with WASSCE Physics

		Self-development to be an APP developer	CHANGED ASPIRATION: Happened in SS3	ASPIRATION CONSISTENCY: Rewriting exit CE to still pursue Mechanical Engineering
		Preparing for JAMB exam	CHANGED ASPIRATION: Influenced by subject experience	Also wrote NECO
		FUTURE PLAN: Learning programming language	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: “not good in calculations”	EXIT CE Result
		REPRIORITISING ASPIRATIONS: Computer first, Aviation later.	Changed school + State for WAEC – wow!	POOR WASSCE PHYSICS RESULT: Blaming the exam centre
		REPRIORITISING ASPIRATIONS	SEC SCHOOL FAILING REPUTATION	WASSCE in secondary school attended
		First mention of Dad: FUND PROVISION	SEC SCHOOL FAILING PRECEDENTS	NECO SSCE done in another school
		MUM IN CHARGE: Mum mapping out his career path	ADVISED TO CHANGE SCHOOL FOR WAEC – by who?	Perception that CHANGING SCHOOL WILL CHANGE EXIT CE RESULT
		STUDYING ABROAD preferred over studying in Nigeria	MUM’S INFLUENCE: Choice of school for WAEC	POOR WASSCE PHYSICS RESULT: Blaming the exam centre.
		WHY STUDY ABROAD: Better job chances	MUM’S INFLUENCE: Personal friendship determined EXAM venue choice	Completed school and wrote WASSCE in 2013, 4 years earlier

		Academic Excellence in SS1	PAYING MORE FOR WAEC EXAM	WROTE NECO SSCE IN 2016, 3 years after
		A SHELTERED LIFE: indoor, alone.	EXAM VENUE WAS A SPECIAL CENTRE	POST SECONDARY ENDEAVOURS: Home + Work
		EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE: He has a computer	WHAT A SPECIAL CENTRE IS	HIGHER EDUCATION: Tempted to Let it go “when you start seeing money”
		EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE: Lots of free, independent time.	EXAM MALPRACTICES MODUS OPERANDI	HIGHER EDUCATION: Sticking to the original plan
		READING STRATEGIES: Alone	FREEDOM OF CHOICE TO PARTICIPATE IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	HIGH VALUE FOR EDUCATION
		READING STRATEGIES: Textbooks. 1st he has them. 2nd. He reads them.	NO PAYMENT, NO EXAM MALPRACTICE ASSISTANCE	HIGHER EDUCATION: Following the path of role models
		EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE: Internet. Textbooks.	SPECIAL CENTRE MODUS OPERANDI	MOTIVE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: Making money
		READING STRATAEGIES: Online research. 1st he has a computer. 2nd he has access to the internet.	FINANCIAL STATUS AND ACCESSING EXAM MALPRACTICES	HIGH VALUE FOR EDUCATION
		MUM INFLUENCE: Don’t check NECO SSCE result.	ENGAGED IN EXAM MALPRACTICES FOR ALL SUBJECTS EXCEPT AGRIC	INFLUENCED BY ROLE MODELS

		EXIT CE result: A1 in Maths	THE IRONY OF ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	A DECEASED FATHER
		EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE: Attended a missionary school	EXIT CE RESULT	MUM'S INFLUENCE: Pursuing higher education
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISITICS: Provision of adequate and qualified teachers.	CONFIDENT OF INABILITY TO PASS WAEC UNASSISTED	Post secondary endeavours
		EXIT CE PREPARATIONS: Doing practicals	EXAM MALPRACTICES PERCEIVED AS WORTH THE INVESTMENT	POST SECONDARY ACTIVITIES: Attempting Engineering stuff
		SCHOOL ETHOS: All assistance before and not during exams.	WROTE BOTH WASSCE and NECO SSCE IN SAME SCHOOL	EXAMS INSTIGATED READING
		SCHOOL ETHOS: Zero tolerance for exam malpractices	SAME EXAM MALPRACTICES, DIFFERENT OUTCOMES	Exam preparation: night reading, library reading, intensive reading
		SCHOOL NAME AND LOCATION	SPECIAL CENTRE MODUS OPERANDI	WASSCE RESULT
		SCHOOL stance to malpractices	SAME EXAM MALPRACTICES INSTRUCTIONS, DIFFERENT OBEDIENCE AND OUTCOMES	EXAMINATIONS: The shortcomings
		SCHOOL High academic standards	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	ANALYSING REASONS FOR POOR WASSCE PERFORMANCE
		SIBLING attends same secondary school	EXAM MALPRACTICES FAVORS THE SMART CHEAT	INQUISITIVE ABOUT PAST EXAM

		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: All boys	IDENTIFIES WITH THE SMART CHEAT	EXIT CE Result
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Boarding	POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	EXIT CE Result: D7 in English. E8 in Physics?
		SCHOOL's POSITIVE IMPACT: Preparation for life	MUM IMPOSED DECISION: WRITING EXAMS AT A SPECIAL CENTRE	HIGHER EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS
		A SHELTERED LIFE: Alone. Personal characteristics	MUM IMPOSED DECISION: OBLIGATED TO OBEY	EXIT CE RESULT: Poor performance in English and Physics
		SCHOOL'S POSITIVE IMPACT: Socialising. Away from the sheltered life but still within a sheltered academic space. Only this time, you have more people within this space.	POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF AGRIC PRIOR TO EXAMS	REWRITING THE EXIT CE: A personal choice
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: A lot of learning going on	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: Subjects with calculations	REWRITING THE EXIT CE: Financial Constraints
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Very competitive environment. Between students?	PRIOR AWARENESS OF ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	REWRITING EXIT CE: "I didn't prepare that much"
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Plans to facilitate learning at an international level – beyond the current sheltered space	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	REWRITING EXIT CE: CONFIDENCE THE 2ND TIME

		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Engendering competitiveness deliberately	CONFIDENCE IN INABILITY TO DO WELL IN EXAMS UNASSISTED	A BELIEF IN GOD
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Physical appearance standards	EXAM PREPAREDNESS: PREPARED FOR EXAMS DESPITE THE PROMISE OF MALPRACTICES	EXAM MALPRACTICES FORMS: Asking others
		SCHOOL ETHOS: Hair and rascally behaviour	WROTE EXAMS IN 2015, 2 YEARS PRIOR	EXAM MALPRACTICE FORM
		SCHOOL ETHOS that conflicts with PERSONAL ETHOS	TWO PERCEIVED INGREDIENTS FOR EXAM SUCCESS	CONSEQUENCES OF EXAM MALPRACTICES
		SCHOOL ETHOS: Physical labour as DISCIPLINE	PREDICTED EXAM OUTCOMES WITHOUT ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICES	EXAM MALPRACTICE ARRANGEMENT
		SCHOOL ETHOS: Physical Punishment for offences	POSITIVE VIBES ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITIES	ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICE: A deliberate choice
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: Poor food quality	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: PHYSICS AS MOST HATED SUBJECT	NOT ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACTICE: A Choice by others
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: Unequal food quality between teachers and students. He felt they deserved better because they paid the school fees.	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: CONFIDENCE IN INABILITY TO PASS THEM IN EXIT CEs	DIFFICULT WASSCE for all, despite exam malpractices

		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: A new (GOOD) Principal doing something about the unequal food quality that previous administration refused to address	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: Looking back, "I would have put more effort"	Poor result despite exam malpractices
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: Why was it important to him to eat same food with teachers? FOOD must really matter to Kamsy.	EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGY: Night reading	EXAM MALPRACTCE OPERANDI
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: A good Principal	AWARENESS OF SPECIAL CENTRE'S FAILINGS	NO EXAM MALPRACTICE ARRANGEMNET FOR NECO SSCE
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: improved food quality – GOOD principal	DECIDING TO PREPARE DESPITE THE PROMISE OF MALPRACTICE ASSISTANCE	NECO SSCE 2016 RESULT: Dissatisfaction with some outcomes
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: Principal's activities	EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGIES: Getting help from elder sister	UNMET EXPECTATIONS: NECO SSCE FAULT
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: DISPLEASED with the principal about his equality stance. So he liked that teachers and students got equal quality of food but didn't like that senior and junior students got equal level of respect .	EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGIES: Group Study	ABOVE EXPECTATIONS IN SOME NECO SSCE SUBJECTS

		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: Senior punished for 'touching' a junior.	EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGIES: USING A SPECIAL CENTRE	WRITING EXAMS IN SUBJECTSTHAT HE WASN'T TAUGHT IN SCHOOL
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: when a Principal's standard for equality does not go in your favour	PEER GROUP DECISION TO USE A SPECIAL CENTRE	EXAM PREPARATION FOR NECO
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: elation by high-calibre politician's visit to their school.	EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGIES: EXTRA MURAL LESSONS	OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS TO PREPARING FOR NECO SSCE
		SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Benefiting from the Government	WROTE JAMB IN 2015	CURRENT ENDEAVOURS
		EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE: An equipped computer lab crucial to his educational aspirations	2015 JAMB ATTEMPT WAS UNSUCCESSFUL	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ASPIRATION
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: Upgrading of their educational facilities	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Electrical Engineering in 2015	STUDYING ABROAD: CHINA
		CRITICAL EVENT: A death in school	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Still Electrical Engineering in 2017	PASSING THE EXIT CE: The focus of senior secondary education
		CRITICAL EVENT: A close encounter with a dead boy in school	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Assessing past JAMB performance as a product of not being 'serious'	EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE: BROTHER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

		No fears about examination outcomes	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Peers in school as motivating factor	EDUCATIONAL MOTIVATIONS
		Nervous about what to expect in the examination.	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Strong determination to do better	EXAM REGRETS: choosing to follow the teacher who recommended malpractices
		RELIEF after writing exams	UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE ARISING FROM DELAYED HIGHER EDUCATION	SCHOOL REGRETS: SHOULD HAVE KEPT “POSITIVE PEER GROUPS”
		No fears about examination outcomes	REASON FOR NOT WRITING JAMB IN 2016	CONSEQUENCES OF ENGAGING IN EXAM MALPRACICES
		VERY PREPARED FOR EXIT Cess	CRITICAL EVENT: FAILING TO GET HE ADMISSION IN 2016	WHY EXAM MALPRACTICES THRIVES: students want easy routes
		Previous exam experience boosted confidence	CORRUPTION IN THE HE ADMISSION SYSTEM	EXAM MALPRACTICE FORM: REGISTERING IN SPECIAL CENTRES
		NABTEB experience in Geography	CONSENTING TO CORRUPT HE ADMISSION OPTIONS	WHY EXAM MALPRACTICES THRIVE: THE INCOME FOR ORGANIZERS
		Positive WASSCE writing experience	EXIT CE RESULT	EXAM MALPRACTICES IN ALL TYPES OF SCHOOLS

		Negative NECO SSCE writing experience	POSITIVE DIVIDEND OF EXAM MALPRACTICES	EXAM MALPRACTICES: some Christian Missionary school exempt themselves
		NECO SSCE perceived as more difficult than WASSCE	SPECIAL CENTRE MODUS OPERANDI	CONSEQUENCES OF EXAM MALPRACTICES: Poor quality school leavers
		WASSCE perceived higher reputation	MUM'S COMPLICIT INVOLVEMENT IN EXAM MALPRACTICES: Happy at the positive outcome for her son.	FAVOURABLE DISPOSITION TO EXAM MALPRACTICES
		Positive Subject experiences	EXIT CE RESULT: HAPPINESS STAINED BY GUILT/SHAME	Rewriting the exit CE after WASSCE RRESULT was his best option
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: unpleasant staff experience	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Still Electrical Engineering	EXIT CE RESULT D7 IN ENGLISH
		SCHOOL Administrative structure	ASPIRATIONAL INFLUENCE: Childhood abilities	MUM INFLUENCED NECO SSCE VENUE
		SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: unpleasant staff	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS: Postgraduate studies	A STAUNCH BELIEVER IN EXAM CENTRE DETERMINING RESULT
		CLASSMATES ONLINE COMMUNITY	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS: PG STUDY dependent on parental assistance	POST SECONDARY SCHOOL ENDEAVOURS

		EXIT CE result: very good!	POST SECONDARY SCHOOL ENDEAVOURS: Working to earn small income	High-stakeness of EXIT CE RESULTS
		EXIT CE RESULT: excited mum	CURRENT ENDEAVOURS: Attending JAMB Lessons	STUDYING ABROAD: China
		2nd mention of DAD: Physically absent	POST SECONDARY SCHOOL ENDEAVOURS: Working	STUDYING ABROAD: BENEFITS
		EXIT CE RESULT: Commendation. Promised reward.	CURRENT ENDEAVOURS: Left job to start JAMB lesson	ROLE MODELS: Uncles
		PARENT'S REACTION TO EXIT CE RESULTS	HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION Consistency	ROLE MODEL FOR EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: A non-graduate Uncle
		HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH MUM	POSITIVE VIBES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE	ROLE MODEL FOR EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: Non-graduate's uncle misfortune
		PREFERENCE FOR DAD'S RELATIONSHIP	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Good reputation	ROLE MODEL FOR EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: The input of the 'Others'

		AWARENESS OF AFFINITY TO MUM	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Big sized.	ROLE MODEL FOR EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: A graduate uncle's comfortable lifestyle
		PREFERENCE FOR DAD'S RELATIONSHIP: why is he apart or away from his dad? Why is his dad absent in his daily life? Why "I want to BELONG with my dad	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Government owned	EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: A comfortable future
		A DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE:	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: Discipline	EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: Life Success
		MUM'S CHARACTERISTICS: Clingy	POSITIVE VIBES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL	HIGH PREMIUM ON HAVING MONEY: Avoiding being 'A nobody'
		MUM'S CHARACTERISTICS: strict	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL	HIGH PREMIUM ON HAVING MONEY: "Become Somebody"
		MUM'S INFLUENCE: Motivating him to excel	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTIC: Boarding	HIGH PREMIUM ON HAVING MONEY: 'Control' and life management
		INSPIRED BY MUM	SCHOOL ETHOS: STANCE against Exam Malpractices	HIGH PREMIUM ON MONEY: Independence and well-being
		CURRENT ENDEAVOURS: Attending Jamb Lessons	FORMS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES	OPTIMISM ABOUT HIS FUTURE

		Life immediately after Secondary school	EXAM PREPARATION STRATEGIES: GROUP study/reading	ENVISAGED FOCUS OF THE FUTURE: Work, research, family
		Independent learning	PROBLEMATIC SUBJECTS: Physics and Maths for 2017 JAMB. Perhaps this was the reason why his regrets were not putting in more effort to learn the three subjects that he has problem with.	ENVISAGED FOCUS OF THE FUTURE: "Scientific research…to make life in Nigeria more easy"
		LIFE CHALLENGES AS INEVITABLE	EXAM MALPRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION	ALTERNATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Civil Engineering
		CONFIDENT ABOUT THE FUTURE	CULTISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION	ALTERNATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Why Civil Engineering
		INITIAL HIGHER EDUCATION PLAN: Aviation school after secondary school. But earlier he spoke about wanting to do Aviation AFTER Computer science. Why this contradiction?	THINKING AHEAD ABOUT LIFE IN HE: AVOID BAD COMPANY	EDUCATION'S WORTHWHILENESS: 'knowledge is power'
		DAD IMPOSED DECISION: Write JAMB	ONLY MENTION OF DAD: AVOID BAD COMPANY	COMING BACK TO EDUCATION: A willing choice
		CONFLICTING EDUCATIONAL PLANS		Attended a Coeducational secondary school
		UNSUCCESSFUL 1ST JAMB ATTEMPT		Did a lot of personal study

		STUDYING AVIATION		Was a Day student
		HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION Going to NDA FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE		Wasn't popular in school
		PURSUING A MILITARY CAREER		A 'mind my own business' person
		PURSUING COMPUTER SCIENCE AT NDA		NO TIME for 'any side distractions'
		MUM'S INFLUENCE: Considering a military career		OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE
		FAMILY INFLUENCE: Considering a military career		
		CRITICAL EVENT: Considering a military career		
		HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATION: Going to UNIZIK		
		FAMILY INFLUENCE: Considering a military career		
		CAREER ASPIRATIONS		
		HIGHER EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS		
		FUTURE PLANS / ASPIRATIONS		
		EXAM MALPRACTICES MODUS OPERANDI		
		EXIT CE RESULT – reflects capability		
		EXIT CE RESULT: English		
		EXIT CE RESULT: Geography		
		EXIT CE RESULT: Lower outcome than expected		

		EXIT CE RESULT: Resigned to accept whatever it is		
		JAMB Experience		
		PROBLEM WITH JAMB ADMINISTRATION		
		JAMB SECURITY		
		WAEC vs NECO administration personnel		

Appendix 15: Themes From remaining 5 Research Participants Interview Transcripts

CHI	CYN	ABI	ISA	JUS
AGENCY	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE	Constrained Choices	A belief in God	A Kidnapped School Proprietor
HUMAN CAPITAL	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Consequences	Disabled Agency	Anxious before NECO SSCE Result	A religious Proprietor who compromised
HUMAN CAPITAL\ELDER BROTHER	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Exam Conduct	Distressing Dislocations	Applied for the NDA	Best Learner in Maths
HUMAN CAPITAL\FATHER	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Exam Malpractice	Limiting Circumstances	Armed Forces Liking influenced by Family	Changed Aspiration Biochemistry
HUMAN CAPITAL\PEERS (Reading group)	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Preparation	Disabled Agency\Change of Guardians	Aspiring to be in GOVERNMENT	Choosing a WASSCE venue_Result+Cost
HUMAN CAPITAL\SELF	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\Results	Disabled Agency\Doing NECO instead of WAEC	Attended Extramural Lessons for Exam Preparation	Consequences of Exam Malpractice
HUMAN CAPITAL\TEACHER	EXIT CE EXPERIENCE\WASSCE vs NECO SSCE	Disabled Agency\Doing NECO instead of WAEC	Attended Govt School	Consequences of HST

ASPIRATIONS	AGENCY	Distressing Dislocations\Distress in the Society	Blame Maths Teachers for students' issues	Crushed HE Aspirations Result and Mum death
ASPIRATIONS\Career Aspirations	AGENCY\Aspiration Choice	Limiting Circumstances\Money	Confidence before Exit CEs	Current Endeavour: Seeking HE Admission
ASPIRATIONS\Educational Aspirations	AGENCY\Exam Preparations	Ruptured Relationships	Corruption in Nigeria's marking system	Delayed HE aspiration
SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE	AGENCY\Mathematics	Ruptured Relationships\A Religious disconnect	Deceased Father	Dislike Geography
SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE\Data Processing	BELIEFS_MORAL COMPASS	Ruptured Relationships\No more Friends	Desire to learn Computer use	Don't understand the Geography Teacher
SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE\French	IDENTITY_SELF PERCEPTION	Disabled Agency\Changing school	Economics Love hate relationship	Doubts about HE pursuits: Money Issues
SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE\Mathematics	ASPIRATIONS	Distressing Dislocations\Dislocation from Family	Empathy for the discrimination of Females	Engaging in Exam Malpractice is a Choice

EXPERIENCING WASSCE	ASPIRATIONS\Career Aspirations	Ruptured Relationships\A dead Mother	Excited about WASSCE result	Exam Malpractices as HELP
EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences	ASPIRATIONS\EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION	Nodes\\Ruptured Relationships\A StepMother who didn't want her	Existing Exam Malpractices effort	Exam Malpractices in HEIs
EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Boost Confidence	ASPIRATIONS\Influence on Aspiration	Constrained Choices\Academic choices	EXIT CE at a Government school	Exam Malpractices_Coerced by Proprietor to Pay
EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Changing Plan	GETTING HEI ADMISSION	Disappointments	Family's Armed Forces Members	Exam Malpractices_encouraged Others to Pay
EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Delay	SUBJECT EXPERIENCE	Distressing Dislocations\Distress in Personal life	Foreseen challenges in the Future	Future Focus_Plans
EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Consequences\Exam Malpractices	SUBJECT EXPERIENCE\Accounts	Limiting Circumstances\Resources	Friends who failed COZ of Exam Malpractices	Good relationship with Maths Teacher
EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Preparation	SUBJECT EXPERIENCE\Economics	Limiting Circumstances\Self	Hall NOT conducive for Exam Malpractices	Good Relationship with Physics Teacher

EXPERIENCING WASSCE\Result	SUBJECT EXPERIENCE\Mathematics	Limiting Circumstances\Time	High Esteem for WAEC_WASSCE	HE Aspiration_Write JAMB Enter Uni
INFLUENCERS		Ruptured Relationships\An unkind Guardian	dislike for Maths	Lack of a positive role model for HE
INFLUENCERS\External Family_Society		Constrained Choices\A Dad in control	Was once good at Maths	Lack of Confidence in Passing the WASSCE
INFLUENCERS\Father		Constrained Choices\A Guardian in charge	International Relations as Course Alternative	Medicine_SS1 HE Aspiration
INFLUENCERS\Peers		Limiting Circumstances\People	Lit_English deficiency and Dream Course	Mum died in 2013
\INFLUENCERS\School		Consequences of WASSCE Experience	Living and Working for Sister	Not attending Geography Classes
INFLUENCERS\Self		Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences	Maths Extramural lesson could have helped	Paid for Exam Malpractices
INFLUENCERS\Siblings		Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative	Maths is too difficult for me	Perceives her brain as now LOW

		Consequences\Exam Malpractices		
INFLUENCERS\Teacher_ Teaching		Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Teaching to the test	Military ASPIRATION	Poor performance in Geography
Higher Education Aspirations	ADVANTAGES	Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Positive consequences	Military ASPIRATION\ Military through the NDA route	Positive subject relationship_Maths_ Phy_Chem
Initial Interest in Law	ADVANTAGES\During exit CE	Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Delay to higher education pursuits	Military ASPIRATION\ Military through the University route	Post-secondary endeavour_getting a job
Motivation to be a Lawyer	LIFE AFTER SEC SCHOOL	Consequences of WASSCE Experience\Negative Consequences\Extra Tutorial Lessons	Motivation to be a Politician	Post-Secondary endeavour_Going for Computer Training
Issue with Literature		Lived Experience of WASSCE	Most Memorabe Experience: Peer group	Proprietor's compromise and consequences

Rationalising self as unable/unwilling to do Law		Lived Experience of WASSCE\Confused by WASSCE Result	Mum's influence on Military Aspiration	Read Well for Exit CEs
Father discouraging Law		Lived Experience of WASSCE\Family blamed me	NECO SSCE result	School as a Special Centre
Relative discouraging Law		Lived Experience of WASSCE\Difficult SS Schooling Experience	No involvement in Special Centre Arrangement	Seized NECO SSCE result
Others discouraging Law		Lived Experience of WASSCE\Scored Mathematics F	Peer Group Study	Senior secondary edu @ Umunze
Peers negative experience regarding Law pursuits		Support Structures	Perception of Self	Special Centre Modus Operandi
An impactful family experience on career choice		Support Structures\People	Political Science as Dream Course	Traumatic Impact of death on Exam Preparation
Motivation to do another course		Support Structures\Faith in God	preparing for JAMB	WASSCE _ NECO SSCE in 2013
Mathematics as a burden		Support Structures\Academic Support	Private Schools better than Govt Schools	WASSCE Result _ Good grades
Blaming the Subject Teacher for subject issues		Persistence and Consistency	Reading for the Exit CEs	WASSCE Result_Canceled Chemistry

Self-regulated learning		Persistence and Consistency\Rewriting the exit CE	School's NON-INVOLVEMENT in Special Centre Arrangement	WASSCE result_E8 Geography
Liked Subjects		Persistence and Consistency\Aspirations	Skeptism about easy NDA admission	WASSCE Result_Unhappy Reception
Problematic subjects			Surprised by exit CE result	Writing both WASSCE and JAMB
Life Dreams			The Military or Nothing Else	
EXIT CE Result			Unpleasant secondary school incident	
Anxiety about exit CE result			Use of Past Questions for Exam Preparation	
Sitting for NECO SSCE			WASSCE Result	
Dad’s influence				
Activities while Preparing for the Exit CE				
Support networks while preparing for the exit CEs				
Background/situation				

Secondary school stance/attitude to exam malpractice				
Exam Malpractices				
Subjects with Issues				
Consequences of High-stakes exam				
Current Endeavours				
Optimism about educational future				
Future Plans				
Educational Advantage				
Agency				
Getting Career Guidance				

Appendix 16: Approved Ethics Application email

Ethics Online Tool: application signed off

Liam McKervey <Liam.McKervey@bristol.ac.uk>
Fri 07/10/2016 10:30
To: Jane Nebe <jn14126@bristol.ac.uk>

Your online ethics application for your research project "THE CONSEQUENCES OF POOR PERFORMANCE IN HIGH-STAKES EXAMINATIONS: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NIGERIA'S SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVERS" has been granted ethical approval. Please ensure that any additional required approvals are in place before you undertake data collection, for example NHS R&D Trust approval, Research Governance Registration or Site Approval.

For your reference, details of your online ethics application can be found online here:

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/ethics-online-tool/applications/42961